THE POLITICS OF *FIṬRA*

APPROACHING MORAL CONCEPTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY STUDY OF ISLAMIC ETHICS

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Raissa A. von Doetinchem de Rande

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Advisers: Eric Gregory
Muhammad Q. Zaman

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Abstract

My dissertation puts the spotlight on a concept in Islamic thought that those concerned with (Islamic) moral concepts, as well as those interested in questions surrounding the theme of human nature more broadly, ought to consider. This is the concept of the *fiṭra*. My dissertation begins by engaging with the better-known strand of understanding this concept, which originates in scriptural sources. According to this levelling understanding, God created all humans in one way, namely for worship of him. But the chief contribution of my research is the uncovering of another strand of Islamic thought that is less well-known but equally robust and interesting. It was put forward by philosophers, who understood themselves as having been created with intellectual capacities not found in all human beings. These special capacities qualify some human beings for special tasks and a special treatment, while also imposing on their bearers an obligation to cultivate the capacities to their fullest in the service of wisdom and the highest good. A deeper engagement with these two accounts is worthwhile for multiple reasons as I will argue.

My research, broadly speaking, thus intervenes in the study of Islam and ethics in two ways: first, by showing that a fundamental ethical concept has a complex history of interpretations. This in turn has implications for how we think about Islamic ethics as a dynamic field. I offer some suggestions to the study of Islamic ethics that highlight the contextuality and complexity of ethical thought and seek to be attentive to endemic categories and concerns. Second, I show that discussions of human nature were not limited to a levelling reading in Islamic thought. This insight is of interest not only to those working in Islamic intellectual history, but relevant to all those working on issues of human nature, the nature of a just society, and the place of education, philosophy, and law therein. While these are rather abstract achievements, I also think that my work has importance today. Engaging with both strands of Islamic thought on the fundamental topic of human nature complexifies and enriches our contemporary debates, in the university, the academy, and society.

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Für

Carlos Alexander

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Note on Translations and Transliterations

Unless otherwise noted, Qur'anic passages follow M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

For transliterations I follow the IJMES transliteration system. I use 'ET' to indicate the English translation of a text and 'AR' for Arabic texts.

Finally, I frequently cite articles from the online versions of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* in its three editions. I abbreviate these as *EI ONE, EI TWO,* and *EI THREE.* These articles do not have page numbers.

Introduction

[A]s a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion.
This is the natural disposition [fiṭra] God instilled in mankind—
there is no altering God's creation—and this is the right religion,
though most people do not realize it.
Qur´an 30:30

Every child is born with the fiṭra; it is his parents who
make him a Jew or a Christian or a Zoroastrian.
A *ḥadīṯh* narrated by Abū Hurayra (d. 678)[1]

[*T]he limbs and organs of the body are different*
and their fiṭar [singular: fiṭra]
and faculties are unequal in excellence […].
The same holds good in the case of the city.
Its parts are of different fiṭar
and the dispositions (hayʾāt) are unequal in excellence.
al-Fārābī (d. 950), *On the Perfect State* (*Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*)[2]

According to two central passages in the Qur'an and *ḥadīṯh* literature, God created human beings in a certain way, or upon the *fiṭra.* Theologians and scriptural commentators have debated the meaning and implications of that claim to some extent. Nevertheless, Muslims and scholars of Islam mostly assume that in the end, *fiṭra* refers to God's way of creating all (or at least most) human beings for awareness of his existence and oneness. As Jon Hoover argues in his entry on *fiṭra* in *The Encyclopedia of Islam THREE,* we ought to think of the concept as "the universal religion of birth."[3] This dissertation takes its starting point with the concept of *fiṭra* and the current scholarly consensus surrounding it. But rather than stay with those Islamic thinkers who

[1] Quoted from Livnat Holtzman, "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyya," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, eds. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 166. I would like to thank Prof. Holtzman for allowing me to use the phrase 'the politics of *fiṭra*' in the title of this dissertation; she used this phrase first in a 2014 review article which I mention in the first chapter.
[2] Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādiʾa ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*: *A Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 230f/231f.
[3] Jon Hoover, "*Fiṭra*," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam THREE,* eds. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe,John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill, 2002-).

commented upon and engaged with these two scriptural passages, I turn to a group of thinkers who are rarely at the center of the study of Islamic ethics and yet also made use of the concept of *fiṭra*: the Islamic philosophers, the so-called *falāsifa.* These are thinkers who engaged with Greek philosophical thought (mainly the works of Plato and Aristotle) in Arabic in the wake of the translation movement of 9th- 11th century Baghdad. As I will show over the course of this dissertation, each of the thinkers consulted interpreted and used *fiṭra* in a particular way, sometimes even in one text or across their own corpus. As my work demonstrates, there is no one translation or meaning for *fiṭra,* in Islamic history or even among the *falāsifa.* Nevertheless, we can discern a broad consensus and common themes among the latter. This consensus adds much to the current scholarly understanding of *fiṭra.* For these philosophers, *fiṭra* is not something that levels all human beings and primarily provides religious insights; instead *fiṭra,* according to the *falāsifa,* is a form of natural reason that differs across human beings. While most humans by nature are reasonable, their intellectual abilities differ. *Fiṭra,* for the *falāsifa* discussed here, both unites and differentiates human beings. As a result, their conception and use of *fiṭra* has political[4] implications.

At its most basic, this is thus a dissertation about different conceptions of the human being in one corner of late antique and medieval Islamic thought. Its most fundamental insight is that for the thinkers whom I engaged what stood in the foreground when thinking about the nature of humanity was not—as it is often assumed by those who come in contact with or investigate the idea of *fiṭra*—what human beings share. Rather, the philosophers used the ostensibly primarily scriptural concept of *fiṭra* to expound the diversity of human dispositions and talent, as well as the

[4] As I will explain further in chapter 1, by this I mean discussions centering on questions related to human beings coming together, such as the basic fact of an inborn sociability, the practical need for human sociality, the shape of human social life, and the distribution of power therein.

political implications of that diversity. But, while this diversity will receive ample attention in what follows, I do want to emphasize at the outset that despite all the diversity, the resultant political hierarchies, and the differences of opinion among the *falāsifa,* they do agree on one fundamental aspect of our human nature: our need for others. No matter how exceptional some of us might be and no matter how well-disposed such exceptional people might be towards ruling—we all need other humans. While for some of the Islamic philosophers not all humans need to live in society or be educated by others, no one can be *just* by themselves. It is these two fundamental affirmations—our diversity and our need for others—that I want to emphasize at the outset of this project. I believe appreciating both these affirmations as central to the *falāsifa*'s thought is important for our understanding of Islamic perspectives on human nature in the context of both the academy and broader conversations.

Finally, I want to state at the beginning that I intend this dissertation as a bridge. The study of Islamic ethics is a field between fields: somewhat located in Islamic studies and somewhat part of the study of religious ethics. My work on *fiṭra* consciously seeks to bring these two fields into closer conversation. I take some of the claims and tools of the history of philosophy and of conceptual history to bear on a concept understood to be of importance to Islamic thought. But I do so with utmost attention to my training in the history of Islam and Islamic thought. Bridging the two fields of study I hope to further efforts towards a more productive, robust, and broadly engaged study of Islamic ethics as a field in its own right.

I. Situating the Project

My project makes three major interventions, all of which are interrelated. My work on *fiṭra* above all highlights the complexity of this concept and the numerous discourses it participates in. My dissertation thus offers the history of the concept, from its Qur'anic beginnings to the end of the 13th century. Second, the fact that this concept is part of numerous discourses in Islamic thought contributes to the efforts of scholars seeking to show the complex development of Islamic doctrine. Finally, the complexity of a concept and the related complexity of the development of Islamic thought that my study of *fiṭra* highlights can translate into some suggestions for the study of Islamic ethics as it is currently practiced. I will describe each of these three interventions in greater detail now.

On the most general level, my dissertation represents a history of an Islamic concept. I derive two central insights from this history: I note the said concept's complexity. Additionally—and folded into this complexity—is the insight that thinkers of the past did not necessarily care about the same things we care about today when thinking about human nature. As my case studies in the following chapters show, the Islamic philosophers understood *fiṭra* to be not the same across all creatures or human beings. In fact, they used the concept to talk about human difference of ability in several areas, including politics. My (albeit, partial) history of *fiṭra* demonstrates that if we assume that a concept such as *fiṭra* has been understood to mean one thing (across time, discourses, and space), we domesticate Islamic thought in a way that severely flattens its complexity and endemic concerns. I here agree with Alexander Key that an attempt to 'fit' premodern Islamic concepts into certain linguistic categories—even ones as wide and open as homonymy and polysemy—potentially contains "elided commitments to certain European

theories."[5] The real danger of such categorization via categories such as homonymy and polysemy is a) that we lose sight of their own contextuality and dependence on certain categories; and b) that they do not simply inform but shape our reading of what is in the texts. As I hope to show in the following pages, *fiṭra,* like the example in Key's work, did work in multiple discourses and reveals to us today the different concerns and commitments of the authors that contributed to those discourses. And since this one term did so much work, one English word is not enough to convey its content. Often it seems as if multiple terms or different ones at different points would best capture the meaning of *fiṭra.* Given this reality, I agree with Key and others that domestication is to be avoided at all costs. Each language uses its own conceptual vocabulary.[6] In my dissertation I thus consciously choose not to translate *fiṭra* (as well as some of the terms used in parallel with it), in an attempt to be cognizant of its diverse uses across authors, their texts, and even within a single text.[7]

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[5] Alexander Key, *Language between God and the Poets: Maʿna in the Eleventh Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, [2018]), 83. The issue is, as he notes, that using such language "requires us to be confident about the existence of meanings and about our ability to map their relatedness" (ibid.).

[6] As Key puts it, "domestication of the source vocabulary in the target vocabulary is a problem because it obscures this fact" (*Language between God and the Poets: Maʿna in the Eleventh Century*, 242).

[7] Here I want to note that—as Toni Alimi has helpfully pointed out to me—this complexity of a single concept is not only of interest for those working on the abstract history of concepts in Islamic thought. Given the double use of *fiṭra* as both something that unites and divides human beings, this concept promises a point of connection with broader philosophical discussions of recent years via the notion of 'dual character concepts.' It seems that *fiṭra*—in all its complexity—could be conceived as such a concept. Dual character concepts "characterize their members in terms of both (a) a set of concrete features and (b) the abstract values that these features serve to realize. As such, these concepts provide two bases for evaluating category members and two different criteria for category membership" (Joshua Knobe, Sandeep Prasada, and George E. Newman, "Dual Character Concepts and the Normative Dimension of Conceptual Representation," *Cognition* 127, no. 2 (May 2013): 242). To unpack this a little, we might say that a scientist overall pursues empirical knowledge through means such as data collection or conducting experiments, all of which are concrete features associated with the term scientist. Non-dual concepts do also have a list of features, but they are driven by an underlying essence that determines membership. They do not aim at realizing an abstract value. Such concepts have two normative dimensions: they can speak of a 'true' x (for example, a 'true' scientist), as well as a 'good' one. For non-dual concepts only the latter works. There are good bus drivers but not 'true' bus drivers. Non-dual character concepts only have one dimension of normativity (cf. ibid., 245). The idea that there might be two sets of criteria to evaluate membership for a single category is not merely a topic of contemporary discussion. In fact, Aristotle's discussion of friendship already appears to use dual character concepts (cf. book VIII of the *Nichomachean Ethics* he makes a distinction between 'true' friends and those friends whose company we just enjoy or who are useful to us). Given both this historic reality and the fact that, as we will see shortly, *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa* does seem to do different kinds of work, the category of dual character concepts seems promising. However, I do not see *fiṭra*

Investigating the complexity of the meaning of *fiṭra* means engaging with many disciplines, from *tafsīr* and *ḥadīṭhth* studies to law and theology. The complexity of this single concept thus also aids efforts that seek to highlight the complexity of discourses in Islamic thought. Since use of *fiṭra* is not, as often assumed, restricted to theological discussions alone, its place in Islamic intellectual history illuminates the development of doctrinal commitments. My work on *fiṭra* thus also contributes to what we might call, in the words of Shahab Ahmed, the question of *"how does truth happen?"*[8] I thus agree with Ahmed that in our quest to understand central Islamic concepts and teachings we must not approach early Islamic texts or societies as "monolithic and monovalent" but rather as "multivocal and polyvalent."[9] Speaking in the context of the so-called Satanic Verses[10] he notes that different discourses discuss this incident with differing "purpose, structure, content, method, and meaning."[11] The same, as we will see, is true of different authors and their texts when making use of *fiṭra.* In the commentaries on scriptural uses of *fiṭra* we can observe the discussions highlighting bodily concerns (among other things); in more religious works *fiṭra* is used to illuminate the nature of revelation; finally, commentaries upon the Aristotelian corpus primarily enlist *fiṭra* as the source of the first principles. A single concept

functioning in the way scholars have described dual character concepts. Instead, *fiṭra* appears to be a natural concept or a degree of category membership that can be qualified by excellence. The discussions surrounding dual character concepts are useful nevertheless since they help situate some of the ways in which *fiṭra* works. Most importantly here is the insight that there are better or fuller ways of realizing one's *fiṭra.* As I have said, this insight itself—namely that someone can be of good or excellent *fiṭra*—is significant. By this I mean there is both a sense in which all humans have a *fiṭra* as creatures of God and some humans are *really* humans as created by God as they fully live out their *fiṭra.* They are more rational, virtuous, more fully participate in politics or law. Their dispositions are excellent. They are the elites. As the *falāsifa* would sometimes put it, they are of healthy or excellent *fiṭra.* And, as we will see in the following pages, this particular conception of humankind has political implications both for the political theory of these thinkers as well as the politics of studying religious and Islamic ethics today.

[88] Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Cambridge, Mas.: Harvard University Press, 2017), 3 (author's emphasis).

[9] Ibid., 15.

[10] Ahmed is speaking about an episode in the life of the prophet Muhammad during which he allegedly mistook satanic words for divine inspiration. Ahmed's work charts Islamic discussions about this episode through history, showing the shifting responses by Muslims towards this alleged episode from acceptance to rejection.

[11] *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam,* 23.

serves and is utilized in a variety of discourses that defy attempts to construct Islamic thought on the basis of singular figures or conversations.

Finally, showing the complexity of a concept and the related complexity of conceiving of Islamic 'truth' allows me to offer some suggestions to a still emerging field. The study of Islamic ethics still struggles to find its identity within both the study of religious ethics and the study of Islam. *Fiṭra* here serves as a case study for scholars interested in ethical thought from both the vantage point of the study of Islam and, more broadly, ethics. Contrasting the use of *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa* with the treatment it has received in secondary literature illuminates some of the limitations of the contemporary study of Islamic ethics in Islamic studies. At the same time, I hope that my account of *fiṭra* allows scholars in the study of religious ethics to realize the complexity of Islamic thought—a tradition that is often either significantly flattened or receives little attention. Hence, I hope that through my treatment of *fiṭra* scholars in both fields can see the benefit of broader, more contextual approaches to Islamic texts. Such a broader approach would be more open to the complexity of ethical concepts, a variety of questions and concerns, and draw on a variety of discourses and literatures. Recent years have seen efforts to discuss both the history of inquiry into non-Christian traditions on the side of the study of religious ethics, as well as of scholars of Islamic ethics seeking to reform their field and move it beyond inherited practices and commitments that often betray the Christian or 'Western' roots of the study of religious ethics. My dissertation's spotlight on *fiṭra*'s complexity illustrates the continued need for such efforts on both sides of the divide. At the same time I seek to contribute to existing efforts by attempting to tell part of a concept's history in such a way that it allows for more just and more generative discussions about human nature within the study of Islam and religious ethics alike.

As already mentioned, I strive towards these goals by turning to thinkers often neglected in the study of Islamic ethics: the philosophers.[12] I argue that rather than serving as a tool to equalize all in the eyes of God, one group of Islamic thinkers—the *falāsifa*—used *fiṭra* to differentiate human beings. They did so as part of their efforts to speak about the human being in the multiple contexts of their interests: questions of politics, virtue theory, logic, and spirituality. Each of the four main chapters of this dissertation thus focuses on one philosopher's use and understanding of *fiṭra* and contributes to the main point of this dissertation in three ways. At the most basic level I show that the philosophers used a concept such as *fiṭra,* generally assumed to be reserved for theologians and scriptural interpreters. This way I highlight the complexity of discourses that used this concept. Second, discussing their conception of *fiṭra,* I establish that they used the concept to talk about what differentiates human beings rather than what human beings share. This way I highlight the possible diversity of readings of a basic ethical concept. Third, demonstrating the complexity of *fiṭra* discourses in Islamic thought and the possible diversity of readings of the concept highlights the importance of intellectual context. The philosophers used *fiṭra* to make arguments about the kinds of questions they cared about.

II. Outline

I begin the dissertation with an overview of the dominant scholarly literature on *fiṭra*, with a particular eye to its different emphases and limitations (chapter 1). I show that scholars by and large focus on a limited set of authors and texts in their reconstruction of what *fiṭra* means and how it is being used. They predominantly focus on scriptural texts, theological readings, and the

[12] I address the question of the legitimacy of this turn (or whether the philosophers are 'Islamic' enough to be contributing to our understanding of a basic concept in the study of Islamic ethics) in chapter 7.

relevance of these texts and thinkers to a certain number of topics of contemporary interest. While there are important exceptions to this characterization, much of the literature on *fiṭra* focuses on a single, religious conception and its importance in theological discourse. Before introducing my differing approach, I appeal to theorists in the study of ethical thought and intellectual history who guide this project. These are mainly scholars in the tradition of R.G. Collingwood and the history of philosophy. These scholars have emphasized three aspects that structure the rest of the dissertation: the importance of history in our attempts to understand concepts, the particularity of context for thinkers of the past, and our own positionality in the present.

After setting the stage this way, I next survey the use and conception of *fiṭra* in the two most widely known occurrences in the Islamic tradition: the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* (chapter 2). I examine the commentary tradition on the two sources most secondary literature has focused on, and come to two conclusions: first, I confirm that the scriptural commentators exhibit a surprising consensus across time and space in their theological conception of *fiṭra* as the 'religion' or 'way of life' (*dīn*) of God. It is this conception that we see so strongly reflected in the secondary literature. Second, we can, however, discern in the commentaries productive tensions or individual emphases, which alert us to the possibility that this concept could be understood and utilized in multiple ways. Both these chapters thus prepare the ground for what follows: the insight that throughout Islamic history, the concept of *fiṭra* has been used and conceived of in more than one way and far beyond the confines of questions concerning a natural human awareness of God.

I show this diversity in four chapters each of which focuses on one central philosopher's use and conception of the idea of the *fiṭra* and related concerns. First, I look at al-Farābī (d. 950).[13]

[13] I presented a summary of my findings during the 10th Int. Colloquium of the International Society for the History of Arabic/Islamic Science and Philosophy (Naples, Italy) in the fall of 2019. Additionally, I presented a summary of my findings regarding the *falāsifa*'s conception of *fiṭra* at the following conference: "The Limits of Justice: Ethics,

I argue that he most likely introduced the use of the term *fiṭra* in his engagement with both Aristotelian logic and Platonic politics (chapter 3). I show first that within the Fārābīan corpus alone *fiṭra* is very complex: it connects different aspects of al-Fārābī's thought but does slightly different work in each of the different discourses, from logic and music, to politics and cosmology. Additionally, while al-Fārābī does think there is such a thing as a basic and shared *fiṭra, fiṭra* for him is not restricted to such a levelling reading. Rather, al-Fārābī often uses *fiṭra* to explore what sets certain human beings apart from others. There are excellent *fiṭar* and less excellent ones and for al-Fārābī that matters in the context of politics and the just society. While all human beings, due to their varying natural endowments, form social bonds, the same diversity of human endowments means that societies are structured along lines of excellence. Just societies are in fact hierarchical and led by the elites who are able to grasp higher truth without the aid of religion. In this chapter I not only show the complexity and diversity of readings of *fiṭra*, I above all highlight the importance of context. Looking at his conception and use of *fiṭra* we see al-Fārābī seeking to convey fundamental insights from his engagement with Greek philosophy for an Arabic speaking and potentially Islamic audience.

In the next three chapters I look at the ways in which three prominent philosophers in the Western Islamic lands used and developed al-Fārābī's conception of *fiṭra* in their own context and with respect to their own pressing concerns and interests. They primarily raise questions regarding the inherent sociability of human beings, their need for education, and the role of revelation in the lives of the gifted. Turning to Ibn Bājja (d. 1138; chapter 4) first, I show that, broadly speaking, a differing *fiṭra* continues to matter for political questions.[14] *Fiṭra* helps divide the people into the

Law, and Theology in Christian-Muslim Relations" (Christian-Muslim Studies Network, Emory University, Atlanta (GA)), fall 2019.

[14] I presented parts of this chapter's research at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego (CA) in the fall of 2019.

excellent of higher intellectual ability and the impoverished masses and thus points to an intellectual gulf amongst people.[15] This gulf for Ibn Bājja necessitates social separation. However, while the dangers of the exceptional remaining within the imperfect city animate Ibn Bājja's *Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid,* his idea of the philosopher—the one of exceptional *fiṭra*—as one of the weeds (*nawābit*) suggests that he still believes in the (theoretical) possibility of bringing about the perfect city. Ibn Bājja leaves open the potential reform of the city—a process in which the philosopher might have some role. In this chapter I also show that affirmation of the special status and potentially isolated life of the philosopher was contested in Islamic thought. I argue that Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 1288) in his *al-Risāla al-Kāmiliyya* explicitly responded to the claims regarding the isolation of the philosopher as based upon Ibn Bājja's (and his successor Ibn Ṭufayl's) reading of *fiṭra* as differing. Disagreeing with the idea of a need for social isolation, he affirms the absolute necessity of sociability and revelation in the lives of all human beings.

Next (chapter 5), I turn to Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 1185) famous philosophical tale, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān.*[16] Here the use of *fiṭra* too points to a deep gulf between the masses and the exceptional sage, or between the one who has *al-fiṭra al-fāʾiqa* and those who have a deficiency (*naqṣ*) in their *fiṭra*. However, unlike Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl suggests that the intellectual difference between the few and the many precludes the philosopher from teaching the masses. There is no reform of the city through the philosopher. Those who are not of excellent *fiṭra* do not need to be taught a more direct approach to God, nor can they really. Rather, they are both in need of and sufficiently served

[15] I will use the language of 'elites,' 'excellent,' and 'masses' following the primary texts I deal with. I do so aware of the problematic connotations of such language today.

[16] I presented parts of this chapter's research at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego (CA) in the fall of 2019, as well as at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics (Louisville, KY) in the spring of 2019. I published a shortened version of this chapter as "An Exceptional Sage and the Need for the Messenger: The Politics of Fiṭra in a 12th-Century Tale," in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy,* 29: 2 (Sept. 2019), pp. 207-226.

by the messenger and his message. Given the different needs and goals in the life of the philosopher and the masses, the isolation of the sage is the best solution for all. While the claims of revealed religion and philosophy appear compatible in theory, the policy recommendation at the end of the tale is one of different paths lived out separately. It is best if the exceptional sage stays away from society in order to not corrupt it, nor be corrupted himself.

Having focused on the question of sociability, society, education, and isolation extensively, I turn to a third reader of al-Fārābī, Ibn Rushd (d. 1198; chapter 6) and his particular use of *fiṭra*. I argue first that a conception of *fiṭra* as a natural division of intellectual aptitude clarified his arguments regarding the proper approach to revelation: it is to be twofold, one appropriate for the elites and one for the masses. As a result, his understanding and use of the term shares much with his predecessors: it assumes and perpetuates a vision of humanity as divided by natural abilities and one that has implications for the shape of the ideal society as hierarchical. However, beyond this continuity with previous philosophical thought in using *fiṭra* to divide people and his particular concerns, Ibn Rushd's understanding and use of *fiṭra* also point to a transition. As we will see, Ibn Rushd uses the term not merely in aid of a division of the elites from the masses, but also in articulating his belief in a certain baseline applicable to all humanity. Rather than providing (some) people with a disposition for philosophy or some vague notion of general humanness, *fiṭra* is the source of rational inquiry that allows all to appreciate basic theological arguments. In contrast to what we saw in al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja or Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd makes it clear that all humans are able to access basic theological truths through their *fiṭra.* At the same time, nobody is able to reach the heights of knowledge all by themselves. Grounding all of humanity's relation to their maker, such a reading of *fiṭra* moves the term closer to the people and as such appears to connect with the more levelling thought of the scriptural interpreters as discussed in the second chapter.

The *falāsifa's* participating in and contribution to discussions that make use of *fiṭra* challenges predominant approaches in the study of Islamic ethics and religious ethics more broadly by showing the complexity, diversity, and contextuality of ethical concepts. In my final chapter (chapter 7) I argue that taking the *falāsifa's* contributions seriously contributes to broader efforts for reform in the study of Islamic ethics. In this way, my work on *fiṭra* is both a case study in Islamic ethics and *for* Islamic ethics. By showing the complexity of a single concept I also hope to underline the complexity of Islamic ethical thought. As my work on *fiṭra* seeks to show, scholars in the study of Islamic thought are right to challenge reductive approaches, calling for more attention to depth and breadth and above all a readiness to examine our assumptions and commitments. First, I show that the problematic assumptions and practices we observed in the case of secondary literature's treatment of *fiṭra* are issues of concern in the broader study of Islamic ethics. Next, I lay out some recommendations that can be derived from my work on *fiṭra* and that can be helpful for the broader study of Islamic ethics. One of those recommendations suggests that greater reflection upon not only authors' contextuality but our own could be helpful. Before concluding the chapter, I thus attempt to reflect upon some of my own commitments and assumptions in this work.

III. Take-away

The findings of these seven chapters can be summarized as follows: it is generally assumed that *fiṭra* is a levelling concept that affirms a basic theological claim: namely, that all human beings—precisely because they were created by God—can know their maker (and possibly some of his basic attributes). This general picture is based on the main uses of the term in scriptural sources. However, as I have shown through my engagement with four *falāsifa,* Islamic thinkers

outside the discourses of scripture and *kalām* used the concept and interpreted in a variety of ways. While the philosophers' approach to *fiṭra* might have some basis in the early commentary tradition, their interpretations challenge the general narrative, both by the fact that they engaged the concept at all *and* in the non-levelling ways that they conceived of it. Studying the *falāsifa,* we find that it is true that all created beings have a *fiṭra.* However, their *fiṭar* are not the same. Not across all created things and not even across human beings. While there are certain things all created things and all humans might share because of *fiṭra* (such as the need for others), the most important use the *falāsifa* have for the term is as a tool to point out seemingly endowed human differences. This use for difference has a political dimension in two ways. First, for the *falāsifa fiṭra* was used particularly in political discussions. As we will see, depending on their particular conception of human beings, different philosophers' visions of the need for and the nature of society, its shape, and leadership differed. On a textual level, the politics of *fiṭra* thus have to do with the importance of the concept for political discourses and imagination among central Islamic philosophers.

But beyond the textual politics there are politics at play in both fields with which I seek to engage. I hope that by engaging with the dominant secondary literature in Islamic studies and some debates in religious ethics, I contribute to both fields as they approach Islamic ethical thought. Highlighting the complexity, diversity, and contextuality of a concept such as *fiṭra* teaches both fields something about the complexity of Islamic ethical thought. As Islamic studies attempts to incorporate broader ethical theory and the study of religious ethics seeks to be more attentive to non-Christian traditions—and especially Islam—I hope my work shows that narrow and flattening approaches are inappropriate. Showing the political conception of *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa* as well as the politics at work as two different fields seek to do Islamic ethics, the goal of "The Politics of *Fiṭra*" is to emphasize complexity of Islamic thought and its endemic categories and concerns.

Chapter 1:
Problematizing Narrow Conceptions of *Fiṭra* in the Scholarly Literature: Lessons from the History of Philosophy

[B]*y a careful sifting and interpretation of the evidence*
you can arrive at some conclusions,
though certainly incomplete ones, […] about the meaning of words like δεῖ.
But […] you have to approach the matter from an historical point of view […];
and in the conviction that whatever the Greek word in question means
it will not necessarily (indeed, not probably) mean anything
that can be rendered by one word, if indeed by any words, in English.
Robin G. Collingwood[1]

I. Introduction

I had not planned to write on the social and political import of *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa*. Having studied much of the available secondary literature, I assumed I would write on several medieval thinkers and their use of *fiṭra,* an originally Qur'anic concept and with some prominence in *ḥadīth* literature, as source of the so-called first principles and whether these innate principles contained ethically relevant content. When I turned to the first primary source, the widely known philosophical tale *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* I was surprised to encounter a varied and differentiating, as well as mainly intellectual use of *fiṭra*. Digging deeper into Ibn Ṭufayl's intellectual predecessors amongst the Islamic philosophers interested in Greek philosophy (the so-called *falāsifa*), I learned that while not necessarily unrelated to some of the questions I expected to find, the overall context of a *fiṭra* that can be exceptional and defective in the thought of the philosophers was (among other things) what we might broadly call political. By this I mean discussions centering on questions related to human beings coming together, such as the claim of an inborn sociability, a practical need for human sociality, the shape of human social life, and the distribution of power therein. In

[1] R. G. Collingwood, *Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 64.

other words, the idea that humans differ in their *fiṭar* (with some being of excellent *fiṭra* and others being merely average or part of the impoverished masses) was in fact part of an effort to think through questions such as the status of the exceptional philosophers and their relation to society, the role of revelation and philosophy in the life of the masses, and the question of the inherently social nature of human beings. While my dissertation is thus primarily devoted to four major thinkers and their use of *fiṭra*, this chapter traces the journey of my discovery by surveying the current secondary literature on *fiṭra* and discussing its assumptions, emphases, and limitations.

As we will see, the available literature on *fiṭra* exhibits three main characteristics: a) it often focuses on scriptural commentators and religious literature and thus emphasizes *fiṭra*'s role in discussions about humanity's natural religiosity; b) it derives this idea that *fiṭra* primarily allows for a natural awareness of God from a handful of modern and pre-modern thinkers; c) it applies their reading to the tradition as a whole without much discussion of the contextuality of these particular readings or the possibility of diverging conceptions and uses. While I return to some of these shortcomings in more detail later, what matters at the outset of my dissertation is that most scholars writing on *fiṭra* lack attention to the complexity and contextuality of a pre-modern ethical concept. Having discussed some of the limitations of the current state of the field, I lay out my approach for the rest of the dissertation. I draw on figures such as Robin G. Collingwood, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Alasdair MacIntyre to back up my antidote to current practice: to attempt highlighting the questions being addressed (rather than the ones we might expect or want to see addressed), as well as the range of answers different authors proposed. Paying attention to the conceptions and use of *fiṭra* among several *falāsifa* in the rest of the dissertation will demonstrate what scholars (within and without Islamic Studies) have argued for a while: that ethical concepts have a history. They are sensitive to context and subject to a diversity of readings and uses. In

short, while the current literature is right that *among some thinkers fitra* had a levelling and religious meaning, this does not mean it does not have other meanings at the hands of other thinkers. Exploring *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa* is just one way of showing the complexity and contextuality of Islamic ethical thought.

II. *Fiṭra* in Recent Secondary Literature

In this section I discuss the limitations and particular emphases of recent scholarship on *fiṭra*. As we will see, authors often focus on a limited number of thinkers and their religious or theological[2] uses of *fiṭra*. There is little concern with thinkers outside the ranks of the theologians or the possibly diverse use or understanding of the term. The possibility of a history for an ethical concept rarely comes up. Western or European[3] secondary literature in particular appears to assume the singularity of Islamic thought, paying little attention to the history of moral concepts or the diversity and embodiment of discourses that employ them. What one thinker thought about *fiṭra* can often stand in for the entire tradition, it seems. Arabic and Persian works on the whole attend more to the complexity of interpretations and the use of *fiṭra* in different discourses. However, they often dismiss or negatively judge this complexity in favor of normative claims. These works often address Muslim audiences primarily and directly. While one camp of scholarship suffers from a lack of awareness of or interest in the potential complexity of *fiṭra,* the other appears inhibited or constrained by its normative aspirations. In the end, however, both

[2] I use these terms interchangeably to some extent; though generally I take 'theological' to describe thought centering on the nature of God and 'religious' to be somewhat broader, including theological questions and those applicable to human beings as creatures of God.

[3] I am aware of the limited nature of this description. I try to refer to the literature historically not produced in Arabic or Persian and often not from a confessional perspective. However, I am aware that Arabic and other languages are now very much part of Europe and so are Muslims and those writing in a more confessional vein.

camps share a common shortcoming: they are overly narrow in their approach. Many scholars pay little attention to other discourses, such as those of the philosophers; relatedly, other areas of interest beyond theology seem to fall by the wayside. This particularly applies to questions of human society, its origins, nature, and shape. In short, scholarship as a whole rarely pays attention to the *falāsifa* and the social and political impact of *fiṭra*. However, as I will also show, there are important exceptions: some scholars do note the complexity of *fiṭra* and its diverse history of interpretation. Several scholars highlight the *falāsifa* and a very few scholars even note the potential political context of the term. In my dissertation I build on and further this existing literature by highlighting the complexity of *fiṭra* and its role in political thought among the *falāsifa.*

i) *Fiṭra* in European scholarship

Much scholarship on *fiṭra* is very narrow: it focuses on the religious context of the concept, either by exploring its scriptural origins or its interpretations at the hand of a few select theologians. Often, there is little to no attention to the possibility of complexity and thus the use of *fiṭra* in other discourses. As a result, scholars are comfortable ascribing the particular interpretation they explored to the entire tradition (despite at times noting the particularity of the one interpretation they discussed). A well- known contribution to the study of *fiṭra* illustrates this. Camilla Adang's "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: the Concept of Fiṭra in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm"[4] focuses on the term's origins in scripture and its subsequent meaning for religious identity. In her words, the article explores the "theological and legal aspects" of the idea of an "inborn nature and

[4] Camilla Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of Fiṭra in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *al-Qantara: Revista de Estudios Arabes* 21, no. 2 (2000): 391-410.

natural disposition."[5] While she chooses to leave the term untranslated, noting that it is by no means unequivocal,[6] she writes that "the majority of Muslim thinkers […] came to equate *fiṭra* with Islam."[7] She notes some of the early legal implications in Islamic thought regarding the status of children and their burial before turning to Ibn Ḥazm's particular reading, which also focuses on those theological and legal aspects alone. Nevertheless, despite the noted particularity, Adang does not bring up the concept's potential complexity or significance for any other discourses.[8] Instead Ibn Ḥazm's particular reading becomes the generally valid reading of the concept applicable to the entirety of Islamic thought.

A similar image emerges from M. Sait Özervali's "Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought."[9] As in Adang's case, the particular reading of one scholar, in this case Ibn Taymiyya, is made generally valid beyond its particular context.[10] Özervali chooses

[5] "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind," 392.
[6] Ibid., 393.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Another article focusing purely on the legal and religious reading of *fiṭra* is Livnat Holtzman's "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the Fitra Tradition- The Use of *Ḥadīth* in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," in Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 163-88. While Holtzman notes several others works and articles on *fiṭra* (such as those by Geneviève Gobillot, Camilla Adang, and Y. Mohamed (cf. ibid., 167, note 11)), she is explicit about her focus on the particular use and interpretation of the concept for Ibn Taymiyya. In line with this recognition she does not translate *fiṭra.*
[9] M. Sait Özervali, "Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought," in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya,* eds. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 37-60.
[10] We find a similar reading in Andrew F. March's article "Taking People as They Are: Islam as a 'Realistic Utopia' in the Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb" (*American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010): 189–207). He claims that the "theological claim central to modern Islamist thought: that Islamic law is in deep and perfect harmony with the essential needs and motivations of human nature (fitra) […] is ubiquitous in Islamic theological and juridical discourses. There are two crucial pillars of it, historically. The first is that the veracity of Islam itself is grounded in fitra, that humans are born with an innate inclination toward pure monotheism […]. This innate inclination allows humans to discern the veracity of God's command, thus making it both natural and rational for humans to obey God. The second pillar is that the divine Law is perfectly suited to the needs, desires, and inclinations of actual humans per Q. 30:30,2 it is the "natural religion," the din al-fitra. A variation on this claim is that humans have an innate moral sense prior to an encounter with revelation that is congruent with the teachings of revelation, as well as a device for interpreting it. These points of doctrine have a long theological history. However, they are particularly ubiquitous across the ideological and political spectrum of modern Islamist writings on the suitability of Islamic law for all times and places, despite Islam's apparent setbacks since the rise of colonialism and postcolonial imperialism" ("Taking People as they are," 189). While he notes that such a reading of *fiṭra* is particularly strong in the modern period, he assumes it to be generally applicable without much further discussion.

to translate *fiṭra* straightforwardly as 'human nature,'[11] arguing that "in Islamic thought, human nature is generally discussed using the Koranic term *fiṭra.*"[12] Like Adang, he does reference Geneviève Gobillot's large study on *fiṭra*.[13] However, the author still deems it appropriate to claim that the concept can generally be "defined as the pure and primary human nature created by God,"[14] making no reference to any other possible discourses or readings. The rest of the paper looks at Ibn Taymiyya's distinct contribution in arguing for a knowledge of God based on *fiṭra* and some of the modern reception of this claim.[15]

Jon Hoover's article on *fiṭra* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE* occupies somewhat of a middle ground. He notes that *fiṭra* can be translated in several ways such as "'original disposition,' 'natural constitution,' or innate nature'."[16] He gives much attention to the scriptural origins and theological and legal influence of *fiṭra;* yet, he also notes *fiṭra*'s use in Ibn Sīnā's influential epistemology. It would be too much to say that he really develops *fiṭra*'s complexity or even emphasizes a variety of interpretations. His entry is quite narrow and focuses clearly on religious questions and those who developed them. But he does not completely reject other possibilities.

Sophia Vasalou's *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics* treats *fiṭra* quite similarly. She does note the complexity of *fiṭra* and its use in questions of epistemology, speaking of "the unstable boundaries of the concept and its fluid relationship to more cognitive elements." [17] In this context she too appeals to Ibn Sīnā's use of *fiṭra* in his epistemology. However, her primary use of *fiṭra* is

[11] "Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought," 38.
[12] Ibid., 45f.
[13] Which I discuss in detail below.
[14] "Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought," 46.
[15] He even adds a section on parallels with Luther and Calvin ("Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought," 53), as well as Kant (ibid., 54) regarding the question of a natural knowledge of God.
[16] Jon Hoover, "*Fiṭra,*" in *EI THREE.*
[17] Sophia Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 74.

its theological interpretation by Ibn Taymiyya and thus the concept's use in discussions of a human disposition for knowledge of God.[18] Despite noting complexity, she does not make any note of the variety of thinkers that might have used the term and does not give examples of different uses.

There are some scholars whose work challenges the tendencies just described and who call attention to *fiṭra*'s complexity more explicitly. One of them is Wael Hallaq. In "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God"[19] Hallaq acknowledges that *fiṭra* is "a concept that is considerably more complex than it first appears."[20] While discussing it in the context of knowledge of God, he asserts that because of its relation to the verb *faṭara,* we should think of it as "the faculty of natural intelligence, or the innate faculty of perception which stands in contrast to the acquired methods of reasoning."[21] Hallaq thus notes the concept's potentially larger meaning, beyond its particular role for Ibn Taymiyya. He even notes that Ibn Taymiyya believes that *fiṭra* can be "spoiled by its being isolated from a virtuous and healthy environment and exposed to ideas and notions that are erroneous and aberrant."[22] This is a rare nod to the complexity and diversity of *fiṭra,* absent from most other discussions. However, Hallaq does not gesture towards *fiṭra*'s role in other discourses—beyond discussions of inborn knowledge of God—despite the fact that he translates it as a 'faculty of natural intelligence.' Thus, while he notes the limitations of his reading, he does not point in any way beyond that reading.

Another scholar that acknowledges a diversity of readings beyond religious or legal concerns is Abū al-Faẓl Ezzati. His *Islam and Natural Law* reflects what we will see is a current theme in contemporary Islamic thought: namely the central role *fiṭra* could play for an Islamic

[18] Cf. *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics,* 78-83.
[19] Wael Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Orientalia* (Copenhagen) 52 (1991): 46-69.
[20] "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," 55.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 56.

theory of natural law. However, unlike many others, he does note *fiṭra*'s complexity and its availability for a broad range of readings and discourses. As Ezzati points out, "there are quite a few interpretations of the concept of *fitrah* […], [which] has been the subject of discussion throughout the history of Islamic thought."[23] The concept covers areas such as "intellection, intuition and reasoning"[24]and "has been dealt with by Muslim scholars from different points of view: philosophical, educational, ethical, theological, spiritual and religious."[25] While they all represent an Islamic viewpoint based on Islamic sources (in his estimation), this diversity means we cannot translate the term "clearly and concisely […] into a single English word."[26] Ezzati believes that at its most basic, *fiṭra* describes a "multi-dimensional and multi-functional realistic attribute and property of man"[27] or "something vested in man's spirit by *Allah.*"[28] Unlike others, he notes that this concept of human nature broadly conceived has implications for all sorts of areas of Islamic thought, from psychology to education and metaphysics. And it has three properties: cognitive (which includes the so-called primaries or first principles), normative (which includes universal ideas such as justice is good), and psychological (which includes love of art or beauty). Humans are born with all three of these properties which are "universal, absolute, innate, primordial;"[29] yet they have to be "discovered, developed, explored, trained and actualized."[30] Unlike many others, Ezzati thus highlights both the complexity and the variability of the term and its different readings in Islamic intellectual history. Relatedly, he draws on a much broader spectrum of sources: from scripture and philosophy, from the ancients to the present.

[23] Abū al-Fazl Ezzati, *Islam and Natural Law* (London: ICAS Press, 2002), 99.
[24] Ibid., 94.
[25] Ibid., 95.
[26] Ibid., 97.
[27] Ibid., 104.
[28] Ibid., 99.
[29] Ibid., 102.
[30] Ibid.

However, Ezzati's work shares much with the Arabic and Persian scholarship I will discuss shortly. For despite calling attention to the complexity of *fiṭra*, Ezzati is notably driven by his desire to show the overlap between rational inquiry and Islam; or between contemporary ethical commitments and Islamic thought. The prevalence of this desire is notable in the author's repeated assertations regarding the existence of such an overlap, as well as the primary focus of the work—namely the topic of natural law—and its repeated references to continental philosophy and Christian theology.[31] The clearest example of this desire to demonstrate the overlap between contemporary ethical commitments and Islamic thought, however, is the appendix. Here Ezzati compares the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Regarding his reading of *fiṭra* we can see that he repeatedly emphasizes the ethical function of *fiṭra*; yet he argues so without appeal to primary literature. Mainly because *fiṭra* is implanted by God, humans can have access to universal and absolute insights: "both epistemological principles and ethical virtues are general, universal, inherent and obvious realities, which cannot be the results and products of a corporeal, physical, material, relative and sensual source."[32] *Fiṭra* thus becomes *the* source of natural law for him. I think because he is so driven to show the rational commitments of Islamic thought, Ezzati shies away from engaging with primary texts. As part of such a lack of engagement, he also never brings up the connected issues of a political reading of *fiṭra* and how that reading connects to a conception of the concept as differing between excellent and deficient. For while he notes the complexity and variability of readings and points out the importance of development and education, Ezzati does not focus on the issue of *fiṭra* itself differing across humans. Instead, as I have said, the goal is clearly to show how 'Islam' "sanctions and supports

[31] For example, cf. *Islam and Natural Law*, 96 and 70-73, 100 respectively.
[32] Ibid., 103.

the concept of natural law and human rights."[33] Islam is the universal religion of mankind, rooted in our shared *fiṭra.* Thus, while this author offers a more complex and nuanced discussion of *fiṭra,* his personal commitments do seem to influence his engagement quite significantly.

A scholar that does note the diversity of *fiṭra,* as well as its relevance to philosophical discourse is Frank Griffel. In "The Harmony of Natural Law and Shari'a in Islamist Theology" he acknowledges—unlike most—that Gobillot's large study references *fiṭra*'s philosophical readings.[34] However, this note aside, the article focuses on the importance of *fiṭra* or "the natural disposition of humans"[35] in the context of natural law discourse in Islam. Beyond this reference there is no engagement with other discourses. Another of Griffel's articles emphasizes the limited knowledge we have of the concept. In "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fiṭra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna" he also translates *fiṭra* as 'original disposition,' albeit "tentatively." [36] For already in the first passage he quotes, he points out that two readings are possible, one that takes *fiṭra* for a special "talent for rational inquiry" and the other for a shared human disposition.[37] Griffel notes the "scant attention" the concept has received not only in studies of Ghazālī but Islamic intellectual history more broadly, despite the fact that it would take "a quite central position in Islamic theology" following him.[38] He further notes that much broader treatments are necessary and that his article merely aims to "break some ground about *fiṭra* in Islamic thought by showing what al-Ghazālī meant by this term and where the

[33] *Islam and Natural Law*, 7. I should note that Ezzati, of course, subscribes to a particular and unexamined understanding of 'natural law.'
[34] Frank Griffel, "The Harmony of Natural Law and Shari'a in Islamist Theology," in *Shari'a: Islamic Law in the Contemporary Context*, eds. Abbas Amanat and Frank Griffel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), note 36 on page 45.
[35] "The Harmony of Natural Law and Shari'a in Islamist Theology," 43.
[36] Frank Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fiṭra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102, no. 1 (2012): 1.
[37] Ibid., 2.
[38] Ibid.

sources of his thinking lie."[39] These sources, as we learn, are primarily Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, though Griffel is again quick to note that because the word "carries such a range of meaning, […] it cannot be easily translated into English."[40] He notes that often its use in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature influence scholars' reading of the term and the fact that the limited secondary literature "tends to assume that Muslim authors equated the notion of a original human disposition with Islam."[41] Griffel's article is rare in noting and emphasizing the complexity of the term and seeking to give room to several interpretations and uses in Islamic thought. Although politics plays no role for him, Griffel stands quite alone in pointing out the fact that scholarly approaches so far have been narrow and under the sway of certain, insufficiently examined assumptions.

Speaking of standing alone, there is—as far as I can tell—only one monograph dedicated to *fiṭra* (in a European language): Geneviève Gobillot's *La fiṭra: la conception originelle: ses interpretations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans*. This work is not only unique by way of its solitary status in scholarship. As the title already suggests, its approach is unique too. Rather than focus on *fiṭra* among one group or as a monolithic idea, Gobillot seeks to comprehensively discuss the topic from the perspective of its multiple functions and interpretations. While many of the articles I discussed so far make reference to the work, they—as I argued above—rarely reproduce its superior approach. For already when introducing the topic, Gobillot emphasizes the many and varying interpretations of the originally Qur'anic *fiṭra.*[42] As a result, Gobillot explicitly notes that her study is not comprehensive.[43] She notes that while she gives some attention to *fiṭra's*

[39] Ibid.
[40] "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fiṭra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna," 2.
[41] Ibid., 3.
[42] Geneviève Gobillot, *La fiṭra: la conception originelle: ses interprétations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans* (Damascus: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2000), 6. In the following: *La fiṭra.*
[43] Ibid. 7.

treatment among a few philosophers, she focuses her efforts on the juridical, theological, and mystical readings.[44] Unlike many of those who use or appeal to her work, Gobillot notes not only the complexity of *fiṭra* and the diversity of its readings but also the limits of her own approach.

Gobillot begins her study by examining the origins and different sense of the root *f-ṭ-r* in the Qur'an, as well as its occurrence in several *ḥadīth* reports. Here, too, Gobillot emphasizes diversity: from the different uses of the root in the Qur'an to several themes in the prophetic sayings. As she argues, these different readings and emphases provide the basis for the different uses and interpretations in later centuries.[45] Gobillot turns to these interpretations in the next several chapters: first, she focuses on the juridical issues associated with the *ḥadīth* claim that everyone is born upon the *fiṭra*. Next, she turns to the theological issues associated with this tradition. In both cases Gobillot traces different readings and their interpretations through several centuries, emphasizing the different uses and interpretations of *fiṭra* for the different discourses and readers. Overall, Gobillot emphasizes the relation between *fiṭra* and the status of children at birth. As a result, the next chapter takes a closer look at the issue of predestination and the primordial covenant in relation to *fiṭra.* Here she seeks to present many different readers and their conception throughout several centuries. Additional issues she considers in two more chapters are the relation between *fiṭra* and *ṣibgha,* as well as the questions of purity and the soteriological role of the prophet. As in previous chapters, Gobillot aims to offer a diachronic image that is attentive to divergent readings and differences of interpretation.[46] While she spends little time discussing context—not surprising given the sheer vastness of the sources she engages—it is clear throughout that different thinkers made different use of *fiṭra* within their own interests and concerns.

[44] *La fiṭra,* 7.
[45] I discuss these scriptural sources and their different interpretations in the following chapter in greater depth.
[46] Cf. *La fiṭra,* 107.

While Gobillot had noted the theological and juridical focus of her study in the introduction, she—unlike many others—does devote some time to the philosophical import of *fiṭra.* For after exploring *fiṭra* as a form of inborn I/islam, the last chapter of the work shifts to those who use *fiṭra* as a term for human nature. As Gobillot note, here the relation is to another term, namely *ṭabīʿa* (nature).[47] As in previous sections, she turns to multiple thinkers and highlights different emphases across these thinkers and their different works: from the equilibrium of different natures to more intellectual conceptions that border on the concept of *ʿaql* (reason, rational faculty, intellect).[48] In this section, too, she gives some space to what she terms the quite radical and visions of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.[49] She highlights, among other things, *fiṭra*'s role for achieving certainty in demonstration, the origins of language, and as a vision of human perfection.[50] Gobillot goes through many different uses in several works and seeks to highlight potential connections with other parts of the interpretive tradition she has discussed so far. Gobillot emphasizes three crucial things in this section, all of which I will discuss further in this dissertation: first, a double function for *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī as both something that describes all of humanity's quiddity and individual substance; [51] second, the role that *fiṭra* plays for al-Fārābī's political and social thought;[52] and third, the fact that rather than offer a comprehensive theory, al-Fārābī's use of the concept is contextual.[53] She closes this section by noting the 'surprising' insights gained from her incomplete and only tentative excursus into the world of the *falāsifa* and the fascinating question of the connection between the philosophical and religious uses of *fiṭra*.[54]

[47] *La fiṭra,* 112-129.
[48] Ibid., 114.
[49] Cf. ibid., 118-129.
[50] I will discuss al-Fārābī's use and conception of *fiṭra* in chapter 3.
[51] Cf. *La fiṭra,* 123.
[52] Cf. *La fiṭra* 125-127.
[53] Ibid., 128. In her much shorter discussion on Ibn Sīnā she emphasizes the role of *fiṭra* in discussions of intuition (*ḥads*)
[54] Ibid., 129.

While she does attend to the philosophical interpretations in a large section, Gobillot's conclusion returns to the legal and theological context of *fiṭra.* However, far from emphasizing singularity in this context Gobillot notes that there are two large exegetical tendencies: one legal and theological and the other more interested in questions of religious epistemology.[55] And within these two tendencies we can discern two movements: those that espouse a more universal reading that has *fiṭra* unite all humans and a more exclusive one that sees *fiṭra* as the original state of Muslims alone.[56]

Gobillot's work overall convinces with its balance: her comprehensive aspirations and rigorous execution never lose sight of the fact that her work still merely scratches the surface. Her tour de force introduces many Islamic thinkers and their varied interpretations of *fiṭra.* There is no question regarding the complexity of the concept and its life in many discourses. Besides its approach, Gobillot's monograph is unique—besides few exceptions such as Griffel—in highlighting two broad interpretations: a religious one and a more intellectual one. As she repeatedly seeks to highlight, these are not mutually exclusive or unrelated, particularly given the fact that they both appear to share the scriptural origin. And even when discussing either of those broad interpretations, Gobillot emphasizes the complexity and variety of individual readings. Her work is inspiring and humbling in both its approach and scope. I will attempt, in what follows, to venture further along several of the paths that her great introduction has laid out, seeking to trace the philosophers' use of *fiṭra* and its political import.

Another monograph besides Gobillot's that connects *fiṭra* and politics is Ovamir Anjum's *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment*. While the work does

[55] *La fiṭra,* 130.
[56] We will see those two tendencies in my discussion of the scriptural exegetes in the next chapter.

not exclusively focus on *fiṭra*, what matters for my discussion here is that for Anjum, Ibn Taymiyya' conception of *fiṭra* is deeply political.[57] First of all, *fiṭra* in his reading of Ibn Taymiyya is a basic inclination, rather than "equivalent to intellect [or] primordial propositional knowledge [or] a rational premise or argument."[58] It is "a divinely placed inclination in the human psyche toward all that is good"[59] and as such complements and interacts with reason which both directs it and receives direction from it. Now what matters for Anjum is context: by Ibn Taymiyya's time, *fiṭra* was no longer a useful concept. Rather, it had been used to brand the majority of people as clueless and not trustworthy, a reading that could be seen to receive support from the *falāsifa's* use of the concept as we will see shortly. Anjum argues that Ibn Taymiyya hoped to establish that it is false to not trust people. The majority are naturally prepared for some general knowledge while only those who really demand more details need to concern themselves with such through *kalām.*

The political implications of Ibn Taymiyya's conception of *fiṭra* for Anjum are thus plain. The concept provides a democratized form of natural rationality that is available to all and in harmony with revelation. It gives power back to the people. According to Anjum, Ibn Taymiyya's 'epistemological optimism,' based in *fiṭra* and the idea of the availability of reason to all, strengthened the law and weakened the legal profession.[60] As he writes, based on his concept of *fiṭra,* humanity for Ibn Taymiyya "had far more potential for recognizing truth and justice than

[57] As Livnat Holtzman notes in her review of the book, "Anjum is the first to discuss the political implications of *fiṭra*" ("The Politics of *Fiṭra*: on Ibn Taymiyya's Epistemological Optimism. An Essay Review on *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: the Taymiyyan Moment,* by Ovamir Anjum," *Ilahiyat Studies: a Journal on Islamic and Religious Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014): 239-47).
[58] Ovamir Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 223.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 235. As he writes in the conclusion: "The significance of Ibn Taymiyya's contribution, as it is clear by now, lies not in elaborating robust political institutions, but in making such thinking possible by deconstructing the doctrines and developments that had foreclosed the very possibility of political thinking. At the heart of Ibn Taymiyya's iconoclastic intervention in the Islamic legal and theological tradition was an epistemological optimism grounded in his innovative use of the Qur'anic concept of *fitra*, which complemented and legitimated human reason and helped bridge the gap between reason and revelation. It is this reworking of *fitra* that made possible transgressing the inherited boundaries and imagining once again […] Islamic politics" (ibid., 273).

classical Sunni theology had conceded."[61] What matters most for my concerns in this chapter is that Anjum's reading of *fiṭra* shows awareness of the concept's prior uses and places its emphasis on the intellectual context of Ibn Taymiyya's own time. Above all (and most likely relatedly), Anjum represents the one scholar who notes (and in fact, explores) the political import of *fiṭra.*

We see, then, that on one end of the spectrum, scholars have no problem applying a particular, mostly religious, reading to the broader tradition of Islamic thought. These scholars pay little attention to complexity and contextuality and thus the possibility of multiple interpretations. On the other end of the spectrum we find scholars that do note the potentially complex history of the term and the diversity of discourses it might have played a role in. These scholars seek to point out the present, limited approach and seek to give room to a wider array of voices and uses. For those on the latter end of the spectrum, use of *fiṭra* by the *falāsifa* is a possibility, though the political context very rarely receives attention.

ii) *Fiṭra* in Arabic and Persian works

This description of recent secondary literature in Western or European languages and its limited engagement with *fiṭra* also applies to works published in Arabic and Persian in the last few decades.[62] Najāshi Ibrahīm's book on *fiṭra* focuses entirely on the concept's role in Islamic jurisprudence and draws its content solely from the scriptural sources. On the first page of the introduction the reader encounters the vision of *fiṭra* that characterizes the entire work (which is rooted in Qur'an 30:30), namely "that Islam is the first characteristic of the *fiṭra.*"[63] The author takes further content from *aḥadīth* by Muslim and Bukhārī amongst others, which is—as we will

[61] *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment*, 268.
[62] All quotations in this section are my own translation.
[63] Najāshi Ibrahīm, *Khiṣāl al-fiṭra fī al-fiqh al-islāmī* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Taqaddum, 1980), 3.

see in the next chapter—a standard approach among Qur'anic commentators' engagement with *fiṭra*. This reading then also explains, as the author notes, the title of the work: the *khiṣāl al-fiṭra* refer to those virtues that human beings ought to develop in order to fully flourish according to the divine plan.

The author thus organizes the book around the different aspects of maintaining a healthy *fiṭra,* with chapters focusing on aspects such as circumcision and trimming different body parts from head to toe. The first chapter offers some reflections on the concept of *fiṭra,* elaborating the idea that "Islam is the religion of the *fiṭra*" and that *fiṭra* is what distinguishes Islam from its precedents.[64] By this the author means that the healthy, uncorrupted person finds their fulfilment in Islam, whose tenets, when presented to them, are in accord with nature. Having argued for this basic accord between humanity and revelation, Ibrahīm then goes through several sources, such as the Qur'an and sunna, and eventually notes that there is disagreement as to the detailed content of *fiṭra.* Some see *fiṭra* as referring to the sunna, others religion (*dīn*), a third group speaks of original creation; finally, there is also the option of a disposition and Islam. However, what is true for all of them, the author claims, is that *fiṭra* incites us to the things God had intended for human beings and their benefit in this world and the one beyond. As Ibrahīm puts it, regarding these virtues of 'the *fiṭra*,' "the intellect knows them well and the healthy *fiṭra* calls to them and the people are drawn towards them."[65] As in the case with the meaning of the term '*fiṭra,'* the author does concede that sometimes there is variation in the number and shape of these virtues among communities and throughout history. As in the case of meaning, this diversity—according to the author—is not ultimately relevant.[66] The reflections on the term end here, with no reference to the particularity

[64] *Khiṣāl al-fiṭra fī al-fiqh al-islāmī,* 7.
[65] Ibid., 17.
[66] Cf. ibid., 18.

of the author's reading as rooted in scripture. There is no discussion of potentially different interpretations outside the Qur'an and sunna and most certainly no reference to the question of an exceptional or deficient *fiṭra.* Ibrahīm does note the qualifier 'healthy' but does not elaborate on this topic. While the author mentions potential disagreements, whether over the meaning or the exact content of *fiṭra,* he does not develop this insight or move beyond the confines of religious questions. Ibrahīm is clearly writing in a confessional vein and for a particular Muslim audience, as a result of which he seems to deem disagreements, uncertainties, and potential complexities less important compared to the meaning and implications of *fiṭra* for Muslims today.

ʿUthmān Miṣbāh's *Mafhūm al-fiṭra: firāsa naqdīyya li-maqālāt al-islāmiyīn* also takes the Qur'an to be the prime source for understanding *fiṭra.* However, he does so explicitly in light of what he perceives to be the distortive effects of outside, pagan as well as Judeo-Christian philosophy for the Muslim community past and present. *Fiṭra* offers a most timely topic for the author because this term has had—as he clearly acknowledges— such a diversity of readings. The basic argument of the work is that while there once was agreement over what the term meant, this consensus disappeared and was replaced by a destructive disagreement the community needs to overcome. In this narrative of decline, *fiṭra* is a test case the author would like to apply to other similarly contested, central concepts in Islamic thought.[67] As he explains on early on, we ought to think of three phases between the inception of Islam and the work of Ibn Taymiyya, who returned discourse to the original ideas after several confusions through the work of the *falāsifa.*[68] Thus, while the work acknowledges a diversity of interpretations and the impact of the philosophers on conceptions of *fiṭra,* its confessional outlook appears to limit its scope. That Qur'an and sunna

[67] Cf. *Mafhūm al-fiṭra: dirāsa naqdīyya li-maqālāt al-islāmiyīn* (Morocco: Islamic-West-Institute for Education and Scientific Research, 2012), 4.
[68] Cf. ibid., 8.

naturally provide the definitive reading is the start and end point of the investigation. Miṣbāh thus argues what Ibrahīm had implied: that confessionally relevant and scripturally bound readings of *fiṭra* are solely appropriate.

A short section on the beginning of the disagreements phase makes it plain that in Miṣbāh's eyes the philosophers' interpretation of *fiṭra* is but the source of the unfortunate disagreement that Muslims in the past experienced regarding the meaning of *fiṭra*. According to the author, the philosophers' (acknowledged) use of *fiṭra* caused the community to disagree on issues of predestination and the i/Islam of all humans. In a rare instance for the current state of the field, the fourth chapter of the book focuses solely on *fiṭra* amongst the *falāsifa.*[69] Here the author explains that those philosophers who worked on Greek thought, figures such as Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, are 'deceivers' whose introduction of pagan thought led the community astray. Their views on *fiṭra* are simply confusing, denying the natural convergence of humanity with Islam and questioning the availability of truth to all humans. The conclusion affirms this reading, calling for the protection of the Qur'anic message from discord[70] and a return to the simplicity of the idea that the nature of *fiṭra* is simply Islam (*al-islām*).[71]

While strong in its confessional commitments and ideological tone, the work makes two important contributions: it notes the philosophers' use of *fiṭra* more generally and in fact describes some aspects of their particular reading. In this, the work goes beyond much of the Western or European secondary literature. Additionally, at the end of the conclusion, Miṣbāh acknowledges that questions regarding our understanding of *fiṭra* remain since there seem to be two senses at work even in the Qur'an and sunna:

[69] *Mafhūm al-Fiṭra*, 154ff.
[70] Cf. ibid., 222.
[71] Ibid., 225.

> One, […] a shared attribute among all people that was obtained at birth. Second, […] the ideal way which the revelation incites to by knowledge and work. It is clear that this second meaning is not shared among people but rather a characteristic by choice. How does this fit with previous understandings of the *fiṭra*? And is there a link between the two meanings?[72]

This acknowledged complexity and some of its open questions, however, do not prompt Miṣbāh into serious inquiry or meditation. The confessional commitments of this work limit what are valuable insights, absent from most other scholarly engagements with *fiṭra.* The primary purpose of the work is clearly to affirm the perceived simplicity of the Qur'anic message (even in the face of acknowledged diversity and uncertainty) and its importance for the Muslim community.

'Alī ibn 'Abdallah al-Qarnī's *al-Fiṭra: ḥaqīqatuha wa madhāhib al-nās fīhā* similarly acknowledges the historical diversity of readings of *fiṭra* and yet affirms a traditional, religious conception. Al-Qarnī, too, provides a chapter on the *falāsifa* and in it offers a wide-ranging discussion of thinkers such as Ibn Sīnā. While it is clear that the author disagrees with the *falāsifa* from start to finish, he does devote some space and time to their rebuttal. Nevertheless, like all previous texts engaged, al-Qarnī's work does not engage ideas regarding the variability of *fiṭra* or a non-levelling reading thereof (and, relatedly, neither considers questions of political philosophy). Despite noting a variety in understandings and much disagreement through the history of Islam, the author concludes that *fiṭra* is 'Islam.'[73] This is despite the fact that he acknowledges that in Islamic thought *fiṭra* can change, growing weaker and stronger throughout time[74] and that, even more importantly, there is a link between *fiṭra* and reason:

> The connection between *fiṭra* and reason/intellect (*ʿaql*) is due to its being the basis of the first intellect that is necessarily created. People share in it according to a disparity in what is among them in clarity and purity. And this is how there is a connection with the natural intellect. As for the acquired intellect, the connection with *fiṭra* has to do with it being the

[72] Ibid., 224.
[73] 'Alī ibn 'Abdallah al-Qarnī, *al-Fiṭra: ḥaqīqatuha wa madhāhib al-nās fīhā* (Dār al-Muslim, 2002)*,* 585.
[74] Ibid., 584.

> basis on which analogies and judgments of reason depend; […] it provides what reason does not provide.[75]

There is a clear acknowledgement here of some of the central insights of the *falāsifa's* conception of *fiṭra;* namely that beyond a basic, shared basis *fiṭra* can become a source of intellectual disparity (which, as I will argue, has important political implications). However, al-Qarnī does not linger with these thoughts nor, as I said, sees any connection to broader questions of political import. The overriding concern of the work is the connection between *fiṭra* and Islam and the possibility of knowledge of God.

A final work to mention from the non-Western or non-European secondary literature is a series of lectures by Murtaẓa Muṭahharī on *fiṭra*. Unlike many others, Muṭahharī spends a considerable amount of time differentiating *fiṭra* from related but different concepts such as 'coloring' (*ṣibgha*), 'instinct' (*gharīza*) or a mere 'nature' (*ṭabīʿa*). As he argues, *fiṭra* is a 'more conscious'[76] part of the human being than instinct and, additionally, only applies to humans (and not other animals).[77] In fact, it is the *fiṭra* that makes humans transcend or rise above other animals by providing moral knowledge.[78] In short, *fiṭra* is the source of what makes us human and allows for our striving towards human perfection.[79] In fact, *fiṭra* is the source of human rights and values and Islam is thus in full agreement with modern developments of such issues.[80] The point of the work is an Islamically grounded humanism that has its roots in the Islamic tradition but has implications for all of humanity. In short, the *fiṭra* of the human being describes "the characteristics

[75] *al-Fiṭra: ḥaqīqatuha wa madhāhib al-nās fīhā*, 583.
[76] Murtaza Muṭahharī, *Fiṭrat* (Tehran, 1991), 33.
[77] Cf. ibid., 34.
[78] Ibid., 34f.
[79] Ibid., 36.
[80] Ibid., 37. Muṭahharī discusses the convergence of *fiṭra* and Islam in more detail on pp. 239ff, including his take on several Qur'anic verses and *aḥadīth.* And, I may add, it appears as if with this argument Muṭahharī offers the basis or inspiration for Ezzati's work as discussed above.

[present] at the beginning of creation and the making of the human being."[81] As such, *fiṭra* contains the *fiṭriyyāt,* or the things natural to humans by design, which the author discusses in the rest of the work.

It is not surprising that Muṭahharī pays no attention to the potentially differing readings of the concept. *Fiṭrat* is a work driven by the desire to prove the existence of a single human nature and thus also a single natural law that is based in shared human inclinations. He primarily engages modern or early modern Western thought, charting a way between those who believe created human nature to be empty and those who see it as full of knowledge. Instead, *fiṭra* is humanity's consciousness and potential for self-actualization, which the author sees as a contribution to Marxist and existentialist thought.[82] In this way, the work shows the contextuality of *fiṭra* also in the modern period, taking on numerous roles and addressing concerns particular to an author's intellectual and historic-political location. Exactly because Muṭahharī is so focused on Islam's contribution to modern philosophical concerns, he does not address the history of *fiṭra.* For him (in this work, at least) 'Islamic' thought is quite monolithic and primarily used to create alternatives to other schematized approaches he seeks to engage. While there is thus an implicit connection to politics—this time in the form of equalizing all humans—Muṭahharī does not discuss the history of the term or its multiple (including political) uses in Islamic thought. His work is firmly focused on the scriptural origins and their religious importance—like most of the non-Western or non-European engagements with *fiṭra* I just discussed.

[81] *Fiṭrat*, 19.
[82] By this I mean that for Muṭahharī self-awareness is innate. This awareness includes a series of innate values, which he calls 'silsileh-i fitriyyat' (cf. (for example) *Fiṭrat,* 33). For a fuller discussion of Muṭahharī's conception of inborn self-awareness see Mahmood Davari's *The Political Thought of Ayattullah Murtaẓa Muṭahharī* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 67-68.

Overall, I think it is fair to say that the Arabic and Persian works are often confessional. They primarily engage the scriptural uses of *fiṭra* and focus on the relevance of a 'natural Islam' to contemporary philosophy, theology, or even the Muslim community. More often than not, there is awareness of *fiṭra*'s complexity and its contested history in Islamic thought. However, the confessional basis and ends appear to limit or determine how authors deal with this fact. Some do discuss the *falāsifa* but mostly negatively; and politics, though often implicit, is generally absent as an explicit topic. While these non-Western or non-European sources are thus much better at noting *fiṭra*'s potential complexity and history, they do very little with it. Their readings end where most Western or European secondary literature starts: with a scripturally grounded and religiously focused reading. And maybe we should not fault them for this. Some—though not all—of these authors are writing for the Muslim community. These works are, on the whole, a more productive starting point since they do acknowledge some complexity, even if they do not approve of it. Setting aside their confessional commitments and tone for a moment, it is surprising how little the Western or European scholarship engages with or acknowledges these works.

In summary, both Western and non-Western literature on *fiṭra* is often quite limited. While I have pointed out notable exceptions, many scholars focus on a few writers, whose (often religious) take on *fiṭra* is conceived to supply our understanding of this concept *per se*. As a result, there is a limited engagement with thinkers and texts outside the scriptural sources, as well as diverging uses and interpretations among those writing on the religious or legal issues. The *falāsifa* and questions of sociality, sociability, and politics rarely appear. While the Arabic and Persian literature is somewhat more attentive to the complexity of the concept and its history, confessional commitments interfere with the integrity of research. While confessional commitments per se are

not problematic, I do believe that in the examples I discussed these commitments interfere with the quality of scholarship as authors shun complex, conflicting, or challenging insights.

The relatively narrow concerns of current scholarship and its emphasis on religious concerns with respect to the meaning and use of *fiṭra* in particular is a crucial first step for the following dissertation. For as we will see shortly, the bulk of chapters (i.e. chapters 3-6) seeks to highlight two underacknowledged insights: first, that rather than back human equality as the source of a shared religious knowledge, *fiṭra* can be used to primarily speak about human intellectual diversity*;* and second, that a particularly *political* (rather than religious) conception of *fiṭra* was dominant among the *falāsifa* since they used the idea of a diverse *fiṭra* to speak about the nature of political life. Both of these conclusions alert us to the fact that the understanding of a concept is complex and contextual—never stable—and responds to the particular questions authors were concerning themselves with. In my case, I will show that the philosophers used *fiṭra* to discuss a whole host of concerns: from logic and virtue theory to education and politics. At the same time, none of their interpretations appear singular, across a single author's texts or different thinkers. Some focus not only on human divergences but also on shared aspects; others attend not only to political and social questions but also more religious ones. Some refer to the scriptural sources, others do not. We will see that while the prevalent scholarly literature is not wrong in its discussion of *fiṭra,* I will show that this literature is too limited. As the *falāsifa* illustrate, rather than at all times expressive of a single, levelling, and religious understanding, a 'traditional' concept such as *fiṭra* is complex: it has been used and understood by a variety of thinkers to different ends. And this is to be expected if we take seriously broader discussions in the history of philosophy. It is to the contributions of this branch of scholarship to my approach in this dissertation that I turn now.

III. A 'Tyranny of Hidden Prejudices' or Lessons from the Tradition of R.G. Collingwood

So far, I have shown some of the main issues in the prevalent literature, which can be broadly summarized as a lack of attention to complexity. I seek to rectify this shortcoming by showing the complexity of *fiṭra* and how it has been used in numerous discourses in this dissertation. Before properly embarking upon my own analysis of *fiṭra,* however, I want to discuss several scholars who have highlighted the importance of intellectual context and the history of ideas in the study of philosophy. Their arguments guide this dissertation both by backing up my claims that the practices of the field as described in section I are lacking in some regards and by structuring my own analysis in the following chapters.

My review of the secondary literature has shown that most scholars are at least aware of the fact that there is room for complexity in *fiṭra.* The same, as we will see in the next chapter, is true if we look at the early commentaries upon the scriptural sources of *fiṭra*: here, too, we can discern a certain complexity of concept and diversity of opinions. However, as I argued above, the prevalent literature pays insufficient attention to complexity. There is little attention to the diversity of interpretations and the contextuality of interpreters, either in the primary or secondary literature. If there is awareness of these things, scholars appear to be unsure what to do with it or dismiss it in favor of normative commitments. I build upon and further the existing scholarship on *fiṭra* by bringing it in conversation with scholars in the history of philosophy. In doing so I appeal to thinkers in the history of philosophy who call upon us to pay attention to the contextuality of philosophical thought, the complexity of concepts, and ask us to attempt to examine our own position as scholars in reading texts of the past seriously. I apply their insights to the study of Islamic thought, hoping to provide scholars in the study of Islamic ethics with new tools. My call for attention to and awareness of complexity, diversity, and the importance of reflecting on our

own positionality delivers, as I will argue at the end of this chapter, multiple insights for the study of Islamic ethics and Islamic thought more broadly. At the same time, I believe that bringing a new, Islamic case study to the history of philosophy also contributes to those working on broader ethical theory and who often take little note of non-Christian traditions.

i) Collingwood and the history of philosophy

Speaking of 'the history of philosophy' I appeal to a long tradition of authors, the first of whom was Robin G. Collingwood.[83] His lifework was to combat the widespread assumption that "philosophies were different attempts to answer the same questions."[84] His thought and legacy elevated the idea that rather than think of moral philosophy as a fixed set of perennial questions and answers, we must be aware that moral philosophy always expresses the concerns of a particular time and place. His efforts, broadly speaking, challenge what I have described as a prevalent assumption in the literature on *fiṭra*, namely the idea that there is mainly one kind of discourse in Islamic history that uses *fiṭra.* Just because some authors in some context understood *fiṭra* in an levelling manner and used it to answer concerns they had about human religiosity does not mean this is all there is to know about this concept. Rather, we should assume that many different actors participated in conversations from multiple angles and with differing assumptions and interests. Collingwood challenges us to think of moral philosophy as a complex and diverse enterprise that is subject to its participants (intellectual) location.

[83] In the German speaking world Reinhart Kosellek and his *Begriffsgeschichte* have inherited and developed Collingwood's agenda; in the English-speaking world Quentin Skinner has most prominently responded to Collingwood.
[84] R. G. Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 60.

We can say that Collingwood's basic claim is that philosophy has a history. It offers answers to questions authors asked in their time and place. Already in his *Autobiography*, Collingwood elaborates what he calls the "logic of question and answer," by which he means that "a philosopher's doctrines are his answers to certain questions he has asked himself, and no one who does not understand what the questions are can hope to understand the doctrines."[85] Such thinking, he explicitly notes, contradicts the widespread idea that "the problems with which philosophy is concerned [are] unchanging," meaning that "Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, the Stoics, the Schoolmen, the Cartesians, &c., had all asked themselves the same set of questions, and had given different answers to them."[86] Collingwood thus rules out that "the same problems which are discussed in modern ethical theory were discussed in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Ethics* […]."[87] Instead, there is an impermanence of problems and answers. In practice this means that while we today, for example, are very interested in *fiṭra*'s relevance to questions of natural law or the status of i/Islam as the natural religion of humanity, we should not expect thinkers in the past to have cared about the same questions. The fact that the *falāsifa* thought about questions of political nature, among others, is to be expected given their own interests and concerns. Collingwood's call to expect moral philosophers of any age and place to care about their own issues rather than offer answers to a perennial set of questions is an important first step for allowing us to give room to and appreciate the particular emphases of thinkers of the past. Collingwood's arguments both challenge the literature on *fiṭra* for its focus on a few sets of questions and support the efforts of some scholars in highlighting the complexity of discourses making use of *fiṭra.*

[85] *Autobiography*, 55.
[86] Ibid., 59.
[87] Ibid., 59.

ii) MacIntyre and the history of moral concepts

Collingwood asks us to be attentive to the reality of question and answer and the location of authors in their place and time. This attentiveness includes not only the abstract idea of changing questions and answers but includes their concrete building blocks, namely concepts. They, too, have a history of their own and are sensitive to context. Another scholar in the tradition of Collingwood, Alasdair MacIntyre, helps us think through the historicity and particularity of moral concepts, which is fundamental to my approach to *fiṭra*. As he argues, "moral concepts themselves have a history."[88] They are subject to and reflect the historical realities of their users and thus cannot be expected to have only one meaning.

MacIntyre develops this claim most clearly in his seminal *After Virtue,* arguing that moral thought depends on a tradition, a context, and time. As intractable, deep moral disagreements over issues such as just-war show today, rather than a timeless conversation, positions in moral philosophy employ "some quite different normative or evaluative concepts from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds." [89] While many, as in the case of *fiṭra,* might use certain concepts, the meaning of these concepts is not stable. Rather, moral concepts reflect their users and their place in history. As a result, we cannot assume—as do many scholars who seek to tell us what *fiṭra* is or means—that moral concepts have one or a stable conception or use across time and locale. Unfortunately, many scholars treat moral thought in an unhistorical way:

> This leads to an abstraction of these writers from the cultural and social milieus in which they lived and thought and so the history of their thought acquires a false independence from the rest of the culture. Kant ceases to be part of the history of Prussia, Hume is no longer a Scotsman.[90]

[88] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 195.
[89] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 8.
[90] Ibid., 11.

But, as MacIntyre argues, there are no timeless discussions of morality. In the past and present, each position is part of a "very specific and particular scheme of moral beliefs"[91] that shows us that the idea of a singular discourse is an illusion. The scriptural commentators understood and used *fiṭra* in one way, and so did the theologians, and the *falāsifa.* While there might be points of overlap, agreement, or shared commitments, we should not expect the understanding or use of *fiṭra* to be uniform. Moral judgements, concepts, and arguments all change over time because they are part of and grow from historical events. As a result, we cannot assume the singularity of concepts but rather need to be attentive to a diversity of concepts and uses. *Fiṭra* for the commentators might be levelling and useful in legal discussions; for the mystics it might help illuminate questions about human-divine-interactions; and for the philosophers it might aid political or logical concerns.

Like Collingwood, MacIntyre's work on the history of concepts both challenges some of the practices of the prevalent literature as described above and guides my approach. It challenges those scholars who assume that throughout Islamic thought a concept such as *fiṭra* would have one meaning or use, rather than—as some scholars have indicated—participate in multiple discourses and enjoy different interpretations. MacIntyre supports my work by giving me license to approach *fiṭra* as a concept that we should expect to reflect the different interests and intellectual commitments of the thinkers who used it. I approach this concept expecting it to be complex and subject to context and thus as defying singular interpretations or simple solutions to its meaning or use. In approaching and exploring *fiṭra* in this way, I see myself as adding to our understanding

[91] *After Virtue,* 51. Jeffrey Stout underlines this when he argues that the solution to a search for real discourse today cannot be "a perspective above history. We should not ask philosophy to perform tasks it cannot perform. Whatever *we* think will, by virtue of the grammar of indexical speech, be *our* thoughts, in *our* culture, *here* and *now.* This idea should be troubling only if we allow ourselves to think uncritically or allow the conceptual resources of our culture to become impoverished—as we do when we pretend to transcend all tradition or neglect the need to narrate our past" (*The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 271f).

of Islamic thought, as well as providing more data to those scholars working on concepts in the broader study of religious ethics, who rarely pay attention to Islamic thought.

iii) Gadamer and the need to confront prejudice

Both scholars discussed so far call us to consider the historicity of moral thought. However, it would be naïve to assume that historicity is only something of the past. We too, in the present, are part of and conditioned by own context. As my analysis above showed, scholarship on *fiṭra* rarely takes this fact seriously. Even less do scholars reflect on their own limitations and commitments in their approach. Hoping to do better, I take lessons from Hans Georg Gadamer. In his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer wants us to become aware of the fact that we ourselves cannot step "outside the historical conditions in which we are situated and in which we understand." [92] As readers, we cannot merely ask what question a text sought to answer; we also have to take into account our own situation, framework, assumptions, and interest: "part of real understanding […] is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them."[93] Understanding for Gadamer is thus a reciprocal process since consciousness is historically effected and part of a tradition. Gadamer adds to Collingwood the realization and challenge that the meeting between a text and its interpreter is always also itself historically conditioned, a realization he himself describes as "the fusion of the horizons of understanding."[94]

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[92] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 384. For a critique of what, in the estimation of some, have become Gadamerian platitudes see Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Ethics in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 92-105.
[93] *Truth and Method*, 382.
[94] Ibid., 385.

This fusion of horizons, Gadamer believes, is the solution to a reader seeking to approach a text conscious of their own and the text's own situation or horizon. For in any act of approaching a text we encounter inevitable pre-judgments that each of us makes in comprehension. It is the fusion of horizons that allows for a more truthful encounter. This fusion is characterized above all by an openness "to the text's alterity" from the beginning.[95] As he notes, "this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices."[96] What Gadamer strives to bring to the surface is for the reader to be aware of one's own biases; an act he describes as working against "the tyranny of hidden prejudices."[97] Like Collingwood, Gadamer thus sees historicity and in particular positionality with all its limitations and prejudgments as something beneficial. For Gadamer, belonging to a tradition, being aware of one's particular place in time and space, does not limit but rather "makes understanding possible."[98] I hope to bring this emphasis on everyone's positionality, past and present, as basic to understanding to my engagement with *fiṭra.* Rather than assuming singular discourses and stable concepts and our ability to simply understand either of these, I attempt to be attentive to historical context and embeddedness—both with respect to myself and those that I engage.[99]

In summary, I seek to bring the insights of the above discussed thinkers to bear upon the Islamic philosophers and their use of *fiṭra.* In doing so, I hope to explore the complexity of this concept and its potential range of interpretations and uses which so far has received insufficient

[95] *Truth and Method*, 282.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid. "A person who believes he is free of prejudices […] experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him […]. A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light" (ibid., 369).
[98] Ibid., 338.
[99] I will attempt to reflect upon my particular position in chapter 7.

attention in the prevalent secondary literature. While Collingwood and MacIntyre call attention to the historicity of moral philosophy and its concepts, Gadamer elaborates that those who use these historical concepts are themselves also embedded in a historical process. All three thinkers challenge the kind of analysis that appears to characterize much work on *fiṭra* where concepts are assumed to have a limited meaning and range of use. Instead we are empowered to explore the contextuality of both authors and readers and thus called to be open to the possibility of complexity, contextuality, and diversity of interpretations when it comes to understanding basic moral concepts.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter I have done two things: analyzed the current state of the field and its major claims and conclusions on the question of *fiṭra;* and laid out my own approach. In the first step, I argued that the prevalent scholarly literature is narrow. It chiefly focuses on the religious conception of *fiṭra* among theologians and their arguments for parity with respect to humanity's inborn religiosity. While Arabic and Persian works fare somewhat better, much literature is inattentive to the possible diversity of this concept in meaning and use. My dissertation wants to show exactly that: that a fundamental concept like *fiṭra* has been understood and used in more than one way. I do this work by focusing on several *falāsifa* who understand *fiṭra* as diverse and take it to have implications for a whole range of discourses and concerns. Seeking to show the history and complexity of *fiṭra,* my work is primarily guided by the thought of R.G. Collingwood and others writing in a tradition that highlights the history of philosophical thought and its contextuality. Based on their work, what I hope to do in my analysis of *fiṭra* are five things:

1. Focus on a writer's use of the concept of *fiṭra,* trying to understand what the particular writer was arguing for or against in employing it.
2. Relate that use to its context, conceptual and—to the extent possible—historical; though particularly with an eye to those he might have read and been read by.
3. Relate the four central figures' use and conception of *fiṭra* to each other; and, to a lesser extent, relate their uses and conceptions of *fiṭra* to broader Islamic thought before and after the period between the 9th and the 12th centuries.
4. Connect both the particular reading of my four thinkers, as well as the clear contrast of these thinkers when compared to more general Islamic thought, to the issues raised in this chapter.
5. Raise some concerns about both our conceptualization of Islamic intellectual history/philosophy and broader Medieval history as an activity that was both boundary-defying and particular to a certain community.

One might now ask, given the above literature review, why my emphasis on the complexity of *fiṭra* and its uses matters. We will see that what will emerge from my analysis are several, related insights that can be sorted to a conceptual, methodological, and historical level. On a conceptual level, my work first shows that *fiṭra,* like any moral concept, has a complex history. This is important for the study of Islamic ethics, which, of course, pays attention to many more concepts. However, this complexity and contextuality of interpretations also matters for building productive bridges between the study of Islamic thought and broader intellectual history and ethical theory. I believe that the narrowness of many discussions of *fiṭra* means not only that the field of Islamic studies suffers but so do interdisciplinary efforts.

Moving from the conceptual to the historical, paying attention to different *falāsifa'*s use of *fiṭra* shows how these thinkers discussed concerns that arose from their engagement with philosophy in their particular contexts. As a result, paying attention to *fiṭra* outside the more 'traditional' discourses of theology or scriptural commentary contributes to our understanding of Islamic philosophy as well as medieval philosophy more broadly. That and how the *falāsifa* used *fiṭra* illuminates the 'Islamic' nature of Islamic or Arabic philosophy and highlights the complex nature of medieval philosophy as a phenomenon that was a boundary-defying as well as rooted in some form of linguistic or conceptual particularity.

Finally, my emphasis on *fiṭra* as an intellectual marker of division and one with political import builds upon and challenges scholarly literature on *fiṭra* and thus offers methodological insights to the field. While few scholars gesture towards or highlight the complexity of *fiṭra,* most seem comfortable with their narrow approach. My dissertation shows the benefits of more contextual readings that are attentive to individual authors and their particular emphases in their time and context. I believe that this case study in Islamic ethics can offer suggestions not only to the study of Islam(ic ethics) but also to the broader study of ethical theory and religious ethics (both of which often do not take Islamic thinkers or thought into consideration). I will return to this topic in chapter 7. For now, however, I follow the traditional path and turn to the scriptural views so prominent in secondary literature's discussion of *fiṭra* in order to see how the arguments made there might relate to the *falāsifa*'s views that will occupy us in chapters 3 through 6.

Chapter 2:
Towards an Understanding of 'the *Fiṭra*': Debates over Humanity's Natural Constitution in Early Qur'an and *Ḥadīth* Commentaries

The fiṭra is "the natural constitution (khilqa)
with which a child is created in his mother's womb
and the religion (al-dīn)*."*[1]
al-Fayrūzabādī (d. 1414), *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*

I. Introduction

This chapter shows that the debates surrounding the most prominent scriptural uses of the term *'fiṭra'* in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* (pl. *aḥadīth*) literature early on reached a broad consensus regarding the term's understanding that remained influential and constant across period, locale, and religious leanings. This consensus understood the *fiṭra* that God created humans upon to refer to the 'religion' or 'way of life' (*dīn*) of God, broadly conceived.[2] Often, the idea of the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) or pact (*ʿaḥd*) described in Qur'an 7:172 aided this interpretation. Overall, the main concern of the debates appears to have been the question of the responsibility of those who die before reaching the age of maturity or legal obligation (*taklīf*), and particularly those who do so while not born to Muslim parents. *Fiṭra,* both in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature supported the claim that all are to be regarded as being of equal religious status before reaching the age that

[1] This passage is quoted in Frank Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (fiṭra) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102, no. 1 (2011): 2f.

[2] Since most commentators speak of 'the *fiṭra'* when deliberating the '*fiṭra* of Allah' mentioned in the Qur'anic and *ḥadīth* passages discussed below, I will mostly keep with that convention in this chapter. Additionally, I should note that for now I am going with the custom of translating and understanding '*dīn*' to refer to 'religion,' or way of life. For a recent debate of the (contested) equivalence of the two terms see Brannon Ingram, "Is Islam a 'Religion'? Contesting *Din*-Religion Equivalence in Twentieth Century Islamist Discourse," in *Words of Experience: Translating Islam with Carl W. Ernst,* eds. Brannon Wheeler and Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst (Sheffield: Equinox, 2020), xx (the author kindly sent me this article ahead of publication). On the matter see also Ahmet Karamustafa, "Islamic *Din* as an Alternative to Western Models of 'Religion'," in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies,* ed. Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 163-71. Ingram in particular stresses the ways in which '*dīn*' "suggests a revelation *from* God that commands devotion from humankind," rather than human responsibilities to God (ibid., 5).

allows them to make conscious decisions. This consensus to some extent explains current secondary scholarship's conception of *fiṭra* as I discussed it in the previous chapter.

However, while I will mainly speak of a consensus when it comes to the term *fiṭra* in this chapter, this is not to deny the existence of a certain productive tension or individual emphases; as well as the fact that over time, the commentators' affirmations and interests shifted slightly. For one, whether this divinely created religion or path involved a mere disposition (*khilqa*) towards God's existence, oneness (*tawḥīd*), and lordship, or a full knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of these facts is an issue of divergence among commentators. Similarly, the question of whether humans are unable to change this original creation, and whether all humans are indeed born on the same kind of 'disposition' or 'knowledge' solicits several responses. Finally, the most radical break with the broad consensus occurs in the modern period, when condemnations of those of other faith become stronger and certain interpretations of the idea of *fiṭra* aid those condemnations.[3] These differences of emphasis and changes in interpretation are insufficiently reflected in the current scholarly debate and they make the *falāsifa*'s engagement with *fiṭra* (the focus of the next four chapters) appear less 'unusual.'

[3] Shahab Ahmed notes that "the literature of early Qurʾān exegesis comprises a range of interpretations on almost every verse verse of the Qurʾān, with strikingly little attempt to invest interpretations with the finality of categorical Prophetic authority" (*Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Cambridge, Mas.: Harvard University Press, 2017), 31). Instead, early commentary appears to have been "and *exploration* of the Divine Word and, as such, was apparently more concerned with the *range of possibilities* contained in the Divine Word" (ibid.). As we will see, commentators in the modern period are more concerned with the particularity of Islam and the need to avoid *shirk.* We might speak here of a tightening of religious identity of which a less generous or narrower reading of *fiṭra* appears to be just one aspect. Relatedly, we will see that commentators of the early and middle period were more concerned with the individual, whereas the late or modern period exhibits a focus on community or that those who live according to the *fiṭra* form a community, namely that of Muslims with a capital 'I' (rather than the idea that all who are monotheists are part of a broader community of 'muslims' or those who worship God). That the meaning of 'Islam' changes across commentators, and particularly so in the modern period, is something that I can only touch upon in this chapter. I believe that the underlying and diverging and developing conceptions of religion in general and Islam in particular that are connected to the question of *fiṭra* are worth attending to in a separate project. See also Ingram on the modern shift from 'islam' as surrender to God to 'Islam' as a religion ("Is Islam a 'Religion'? Contesting *Din*-Religion Equivalence in Twentieth Century Islamist Discourse," 4).

Nevertheless, despite a variety of debates and overall shifts in interpretation, the take-away of this chapter remains the overwhelming and early established consensus regarding the proper understanding of the term '*fiṭra.*' Among those commenting on the scriptural sources, *fiṭra* was primarily conceived of as a religious and equalizing concept that makes all humans before maturity inclined towards some form of proto-Islam or monotheism.[4] The following analysis thus serves two purposes: first, the consensus that appears to have existed regarding a reading of the idea of 'the *fiṭra'* shows the complexity of this from one direction.[5] Second, setting my analysis in this chapter, as well as the following ones on the *falāsifa* in conversation with much of the available secondary literature on the term '*fiṭra'* shows how much that secondary literature relies on the scriptural sources and its commentary tradition alone. The consensus regarding the meaning of *fiṭra* described here thus also prepares my critical engagement with the current state of Islamic ethics.[6]

II. The Term '*Fiṭra'*

Before delving into the commentaries, I will first provide a general introduction to the term '*fiṭra*.'[7] The basic meaning of the root *f-ṭ-r* in the Qur'an is 'to create,' as well as 'to open' or 'to split.'[8] As Camilla Adang has pointed out, in most cases the sense is that God created the heavens

[4] As Griffel notes, an Egyptian tombstone from 891 already connects the *fiṭra* and Islam as it records a person who died "in accord with the *fiṭra* of Islam and the religion of Muhammad" ("al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (fiṭra)," 3 n. 10).
[5] The other direction that shows this complexity is the *falāsifa's* understanding of *fiṭra* as an intellectual capacity that separates those fit for philosophical, political, or ethical leadership from the rest. This I turn to in the following chapters by engaging the use, understanding, and broader context of *fiṭra* in the works of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198).
[6] In chapter 7 I turn to the potential relevance of my work on *fiṭra* to the study of Islamic Ethics as an academic field.
[7] I am in no position to evaluate Theodor Noeldecke and Friedrich Schwally's frequently cited claim that *fiṭra* is an Ethiopian loan-word, meaning a way of being created; but it seems in line with what I describe below (cf. Frank Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (fiṭra)," 3).
[8] Geneviève Gobillot notes that the root *f-ṭ-r* exists in all the ancient Semitic language, i.e. Akkadian, Hebrew, Syriac, and Ethiopian (*La fiṭra: la conception originelle, ses interpretations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans* (Damascus: Insititut Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, 2000), 7; she discusses some of the different meanings in these languages on pp. 7-9, though they agree with the Qur'anic sense of creating as well as splitting/opening).

and the earth (Qur'an 6:14, 79; 12:101; 14:10; 21:56; 35:1; 39:46; 42:11).[9] Some verses, Adang further notes, specifically describe God as creating humanity (Qur'an 11:51; 36:22; 43:27; 17:51; 20:72). Finally, a few occurrences have the sense of breaking something apart (Qur'an 19:90; 42:5; 82:1; 73:18; 67:3).[10] Ibn Manẓur (d. 1233) in his famous *Lisān al-ʿarab* expands this second sense for us,[11] noting that the basic meaning of the root is to 'split' or 'crack' something (*shaqq*). *Fiṭra* is thus something with a crack or fissure. However, the specific term *'fiṭra*' only occurs once in the Qur'an, in verse 30 of *Surat al-Rūm* (the 30th chapter of the Qur'an);[12] and, based on his linguistic analysis, Ibn Manẓur concludes that it refers to "that which God created the creature upon, namely the knowledge of him (*maʿrifa bihi*)."[13] In these arguments he follows the work of probably the most important Arabic grammarian, ʾAbū Zakariyyāʾ al-Farrāʾ (d. 822). He had written in his *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* that *fiṭra* is the "*dīn* of Allāh "[14] and that this is to be related to the

[9] Camilla Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of Fitra in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *Al-Qantara: Revista de Estudios Arabes* 21, no. 2 (2000): 393, n. 6.
[10] Camilla Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind," 393 n. 6. Gobillot discusses in some detail all the uses of the root *f-ṭ-r* in the Qur'an (cf. *La fiṭra,* pp. 10-14).
[11] Ibn Manẓur, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1988), 275.
[12] Qur'an 30:30 reads as follows: "So […] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition [fiṭra] God instilled in mankind—there is no altering God's creation—and this is the right religion, though most people do not realize it." M. Sait Özervarli further notes that Qur'an 2:138 ("[Our life] takes its colour from God, and who gives a better colour than God? It is Him we worship"), which speaks of the color (*ṣibgha*) from God, ought also be related to a search for the meaning of the term '*fiṭra*' (cf. M. Sait Özervali, "Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *Fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought," in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy, and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya,* ed. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin; Boston: de Gruyter, 2013), 46). However, al-Farrā''s reference aside, the number of commentators that bring up the term '*ṣibgha'* when discussing *fiṭra* is small. In comments on Qur'an 30: 30, 7:172 or even the prophetic sayings the term does not come up at all. Some commentators, including Al-Māturīdī in his comments on *Surat al-Baqara* do point out that the 'color' refers to the *fiṭra*; additionally, Gobillot notes that both al-Ṭūṣī and al-Ṭabarī offer a list of ancient commentators who connected the two concepts or saw them as equal (cf. *La fiṭra,* 71). For more on the history of the term '*ṣibgha,'* see *La fiṭra,* pp. 71ff. Gobillot further notes that there is also a connection between the concept of the *ṣibgha* and *fiṭra* via the idea of the ten or five prescribed acts (including circumcision, cutting the beard and so forth (ibid., 73ff). Finally, Murtaza Muṭahharī also discusses the concepts of *ṣibgha* and *ḥanīf* as synonyms of *fiṭra* (cf. *Fiṭrat* (Tehran, 1991), 24-29).
[13] *Lisān al-ʿarab,,* 276. Ibn Manẓur then notes the attendant issues of the belief of children, as well as the question of the first covenant God made with the descendants of Adam and the predestination of some for heaven and others for hell (pp. 276-277). Ibn Manẓur is also aware of possible differences between the meaning of *fiṭra* in the Qur'an (a knowledge of God) and several *ḥadīth* reports, particularly those that refer to a child's religion vs. those that mention the five or ten things that are part of the prophetic *sunna*.
[14] ʾAbū Zakariyyāʾ al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār Alim al-Kutub, 1983), 2: 324.

'color (*ṣibgha*) from God' mentioned in Qur'an 2:138. In his explication of the phrase that we are 'created upon' the *fiṭra,* al-Farrāʾ argues that humans are born on this *dīn* until parents make them Jews or Christians (referring to the *ḥadīth* described in greater detail below).[15] What that means, according to al-Farrāʾ, is that all are born knowing that they have "a lord (*rabb*) and creator (*mudabbir*)."[16] However, how we are to exactly understand this way of being created by God through which the creature knows its creator[17] is what I shall explore in the following sections by drawing on both Qur'anic commentary (*tafsīr*) and *ḥadīth* commentators that engage with several prophetic utterances that make use of the term *fiṭra.*[18]

III. *Fiṭra* in the Qur'an

Reconstructing an 'early' conception of *fiṭra* is a trying task given the scarcity of sources at our disposal.[19] As I have noted, the most prominent use of the term occurs in the Qur'an and it

[15] *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān,* 2:324.
[16] Ibid.
[17] As Özervarli notes, the majority of thinkers "did not evaluate human nature as a means of discovering divine wisdom by acknowledging a transcendent existent in God's creation. Even in theological books, the majority of the *mutakallimūn* did not include the human nature argument among their proofs of the existence of God […]. In the classical period, only a few independent-minded scholars, such as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869), Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (d. 966?), al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. early 11th century), and al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), touched upon human nature as an argument for divine existence, without discussing it in detail. In the later period, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) paid more attention to this argument" ("Divine Wisdom, Human Agency," 47). He further notes that the idea of a proof by human nature becomes more of argument in modern period, as *fiṭra* is seen as a secure source of knowledge (cf. ibid., 52f).
[18] I should add that Gobillot argues that the Muʿtazili al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869) had a slightly different sense, which was in fact closer to that of *ṭabīʿa* or nature: namely the perfect flourishing/harmony of the four humors and thus a healthy human constitution that avoids certain carnal temptations (cf. *La fiṭra,* 113-116; this argument occurs in a section called 'al-Meʿāsh wa al-maʿād' in his *Majmū al-rasāʾil* (ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964-1979, 1: 91-134). While his thoughts on *fiṭra* are rather made in passing here, we may note that it appears as if reason and *fiṭra* complement each other for him. Thus, he speaks on p. 91f of the "health/harmony (*ṣiḥḥa*) of the *fiṭra* and the perfection of the mind (*kamāl al-ʿaql*)" and on p. 95 *fiṭra* and *ʿaql* are what make for a proper human act. Nevertheless, Gobillot concedes that despite the idea of a harmony of elements, the basic sense of a disposition for religion, and Islam in particular, also seems to be retained in this reading (cf. *La fiṭra,* 114, 116). A similar reading of an equilibrium of natures can also be found in Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *ʿUyūn al-akbār* in the section entitled 'Kitāb al-tabāʾi' ([?]: Dār al-Kutub al-maṣrīya, 1925, vol. 2: 62 (cf. Gobillot, *La fiṭra,* 116f)). There might thus be both evidence of a variety of possible interpretations of the term early on, as well as a developing reading of *fiṭra* as (an intellectual) human perfection.
[19] On the issue of whether *tafsīr* reflected common opinions, particularly in the early period, I am relying on Karen Bauer's claim that "the earliest preserved works of *tafsīr* are written in a style that seems to reflect some elements of popular understanding"("A Note on the Relationship between *Tafsīr* and Common Understanding with Reference to

was only in the 8th century C.E. that the tradition of commenting on the Qur'an (*tafsīr*) developed. This tradition originated from the first generation of companions, or those who studied with people such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d.687) or Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767). What began as mere explanation of the Qur'an, eventually became a whole genre that contained features such as philology, jurisprudence, theology and hadith.[20] Since the 9th century we might thus speak of 'a science of *tafsīr,*' which developed as part of the Qur'anic sciences. As the editors of a recent anthology of commentaries point out, at that point there was both a "continuity of form and method" as well as "plurality of voices."[21] It reached its classical form by the 10th century in the work of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923). Afterwards people reproduced or added their own emphases.[22] Thus, as Mahmoud Ayoub notes, as this *tafsīr* tradition took off, it began to "reflect the training, religious affiliation, and interest of their writers."[23] Grammarians, jurists, mystics, philosophers, theologians, as well as

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Contracts of Marriage," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone,* eds. Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, Robert G. Hoyland, and Adam Silverstein (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 97). She adds that although classical exegesis "may have been written for scholars, it also broadly reflected social mores and common ideas" (ibid.). She sees "the roots of *tafsīr* in popular preaching, and as a record of common understanding" (ibid., 109).

Joseph van Ess claims that already Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) speculated about the meaning of the *fiṭra* and connected it to the primordial covenant (*Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 4: 593). He generally connects interest in the term with the issue of predestination and early Muslim debates with the Qadarīya over the possibility and shape of a natural Islam (cf. *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie: Studien zum Entstehen Prädestinatianischer Überlieferung* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1975), 101-114). As van Ess notes in more detail, the first person to discuss the meaning of the *fiṭra ḥadīth* was Wensinck (*The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 42-44); he claims the source of the saying is concerns over killing the children of unbelievers during the early wars. Van Ess sees this origin as possible but not unproblematic given that there was little issue with either selling such children into slavery, or the killing of other Muslims by the Khārijites (cf. *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie,* 102). Connecting the *ḥadīth* with Qur'an 30:30, van Ess rather sees the meaning as pointing to an 'Ur-monotheism' also described by the idea of the *ḥanīf* as well as the covenant of Qur'an 7:172. However, he also notes that already in the 2nd and 3rd century we can see efforts to dispute this interpretation in favor of more deterministic readings as well as the issue of humanity's inherent goodness or badness (cf. *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie,* 110f).

[20] Feres Hamza and Sajja Rizvi (eds.), *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), Vol. 1: 3.

[21] Ibid., 1.

[22] As Bauer puts it, *"tafsīr* is each scholar's attempt to relate his world to the world of the Qur'an; it is his attempt to relate his intellectual, political and social contexts to the Qur'an's text" (*Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis (2nd/8th-9th/15th centuries)*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8).

[23] Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 1: 3. For a more detailed history of the genre, including Sufi and Shīʿi *tafsīr,* see pp. 32-39 in ibid.

different religious groups began to compile works. As we will see below, the 'continuity' and the 'plurality,' as well as certain individual emphases are well on display when it comes to the issue of God's way of creating humanity.

In my survey, I start with very early commentaries such as those by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān and Yayḥa ibn Sallām. I then move to the works of commentators such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Māturīdī (who are both important to the tradition and witnesses to early commentators), as well as several later works that contain earlier material. I round my foray off by considering several modern and early modern works for comparison of content and concern when it comes to the idea of *fiṭra*. Overall, I have thus divided the following analysis into three phases: an early one that stops with at the end of the 10th century with al-Samarqandī (d. 983); a middle phase that ends with Maḥallī (d. 1459); and a late one that finishes with Ṭabāṭabāʾi (d. 1981). In my selection, I aimed to be both representative and comprehensive.

By way of orientation, I can already say that the commentators across time, locale, and religious affiliation by and large agree on the broad strokes of their conception of the Qur'anic *fiṭra.* A broad summary statement by Adang is broadly fitting in this regard, if you substitute 'majority of Muslim thinkers' for 'majority of Qur'anic commentators:'

> the majority of Muslim thinkers […] came to equate fitra with Islam, and hence to believe that everyone starts his life as a Muslim. They found corroboration for their interpretation in another passage from the Koran, viz. S. 7:172, in which God makes a covenant with the descendants of Adam, who unanimously and unwaveringly confirm that God is their Lord.[24]

And as we will see, this assessment is particularly true of the early and middle period of Qur'anic commentaries.[25] However, claiming this is not to deny that commentators offer us (particularly

[24] "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind," 393. Qur'an 7:172 reads as follows: "when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this.'

[25] As my dissertation as a whole shows, this statement is not true if we take the *falāsifa* from al-Fārābī to Ibn Rushd into consideration.

reported second hand) some variety regarding understandings of *fiṭra*.[26] While the majority of thinkers see *fiṭra* as a form of *dormant* Islam or belief in God's oneness and lordship that unites all humans and brings children before maturity into the fold of Islam,[27] the modern period would see the largest break with that view. One's upbringing becomes less of an excuse as commentators become more convinced of the reliability of the inborn potential for Islam; and, as a result, they judge those who do not choose to live according to it more harshly. In this vein, the reference in Qur'an 30:30 to 'no change' in the religion (*dīn*) of Allāh increasingly turns from a factual statement into a prohibition. This realization of a gradual affirmation of boundaries (or a narrower concept of that 'religion' that is supposedly natural to all humans)[28] helps throw the conception of *fiṭra* in the earlier centuries into even sharper focus. Exegesis of Qur'an 30:30 and 7: 172 together affirms the in-built inclination of *all* human beings for a knowledge of (and thus also submission to) Allāh. While a minority view convinced of (double) predestination exists,[29] the majority affirm that change is solely the result of parental misguidance. As a result, all children before the age of maturity can be treated as Muslims.

[26] As Adang notes, for some it referred to "God's plan, or destiny […]. Others took *fiṭra* to refer to a healthy physical condition, a state of perfection. Others again saw *fiṭra* as an inborn tendency, a natural disposition towards monotheism (*tawḥīd*), or even towards Islam itself" ("Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind," 393).

[27] A related Qur'anic concept of dormant faith, and one that will come up again in my discussion below, is that of the *ḥanīf.* As Griffel argues, this "is someone who lived before the advent of Islam according to rules and convictions that are similar to it" ("al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (fiṭra)," 3). In the Qur'an (esp. *Sura* 6:75-79) Abraham is the model of such a person par excellence.

[28] By this I mean an increasing shift in the meaning of both the supposed natural 'religion' or 'islam' that is given to all humans; from a more general submission to God to 'Islam' with a capital 'I.' I will take a little about this issue below but I do not have the space to develop this further.

[29] I.e. the idea that some people are destined for heaven, others for hell.

i) Phase I: The early period (8th – 10th century)

In order to get a sense of understandings of and debates surrounding the *fiṭra* during the early period, I considered the following commentators:[30] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhi (d. 767), whose *tafsīr* is generally considered to be the earliest extant commentary on the Qur'an;[31] Yaḥya ibn Sallām (d. 815), who most likely was a Murjiʾī[32] and transmitted the opinions of several important companions;[33] al-Tustarī (d. 896), who offers the earliest surviving Sufi commentary; the Ibāḍī[34] Hūd al-Hawwāri (d. 903), who is highly regarded as a leading member of the early *mufassirūn;* al-Qummī (d. 919), who wrote the earliest extant Shīʿi commentary; al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), whose *tafsīr* is probably the most famous classical Sunni work; ʾAbū al-Naḍr al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 932), a classical commentator of the Eastern Islamic lands who converted to Shīʿism; the ʾIsmāʿīlī Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 938); the Muʿtazili ʾAbū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿīsā al-Rummānī (d.944);[35] al-Samarqandī (also known as ʾAbū Manṣūr al- Māturīdī (d. 944)), a Sunni Ḥanafī jurist and founder of one of the major theological schools; and finally ʾAbū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983), a commentator very popular among the Ottomans. While it might be more customary within the historical development of *tafsīr* to stop with al-Ṭabarī, I chose to prolong this early period in accordance with this inquiry's main aim, that is in order to consider multiple options of

[30] All translations are my own, both of the Qur'anic and the *ḥadīth* commentaries.
[31] I did consult the *tafsīr* of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 687), *Tanwīr al-miqbās min Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās*. The work's authorship, however, is much disputed as it is both attributed to the companion ʿAbdullah Ibn ʿAbbās and Muḥammad ibn Ya'qub al-Fayrūzabādī (d. 1414). The commentary on *Surat al-Rūm* 30*,* in any case, is not out of the ordinary, if only a little more explicit in its affirmation of the *Sura's* overall call to turn to Islam (rather than God's lordship or oneness). The *fiṭra* is the "*dīn* of Allāh " here (*Tanwīr al-miqbās min Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* (Egypt: al-Maktabat al-Tijārīya al-Kubrā, 1960), 252) and being 'created on it' refers to "the inside of their mothers" and the fact that God asks humans to observe it "on the day of the covenant (*mīthāq*)" (ibid; this is a reference to 7:172 though not explicitly). The religion, which knows no change, is "the straight truth" (*al-haqq al-mustaqīm*). The majority of people who do not know are "the people of Mecca" and what they do not know is that "the true religion (*dīn*) of Allāh is Islam" (ibid.).
[32] *Murjiʾa* (lit. 'those who postpone'): an early Islamic sect that believed in the postponement of judgment regarding those who committed sins, arguing that God alone was able to decide whether a Muslim had lost their faith.
[33] Cf. Feres Hamza and Sajja Rizvi (eds.), *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries,* 1: 23.
[34] Ibadism or the Ibāḍiyya is a school of Islam today predominantly found in Oman. Early on they broke away from the Kharijites; while they too opposed the rule of the third caliph, Uthman, they did not support his murder.
[35] We do no longer have his commentary on 30:30.

understanding the term that might have been circulating early one (and were thus available during al-Fārābī's time). [36]

The basic claim of those commentaries can be summarized as follows: the term *fiṭra* in Qur'an 30:30 describes the *dīn* that God calls the addressees of the verse to fully devote themselves to in a manner reminiscent of a *ḥanīf,* who is naturally inclined towards and absolutely devoted to God.[37] This *fiṭra* is thus to be understood as the *dīn* or *milla* of I/islam or Allāh.[38] What that means practically is an awareness of God's oneness or *tawḥīd.*[39] Many commentators draw a connection to the episode recorded in Qur'an 7:172 (and, a little less frequently, refer to the concept of *fiṭra* in their comments on that latter chapter),[40] as well as the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra (d. 681),[41] a companion of the Prophet and the most prolific *ḥadīth* narrator.[42] However, beyond this basic affirmation, these early commentators do not provide a lot of thoughts or extended details regarding the meaning of their claims. There is some disagreement regarding who exactly the verse is addressed to (is it all humans, all believers, the Prophet alone, the Prophet as a representative),[43]

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[36] Another, practical reason, was that if I had stopped early in the 10th century, the middle section would have gotten even larger.

[37] We get a very comprehensive and representative description of the call to the *ḥanīf* religion in ʾAbū al Layth al-Samarqandī's *tafsīr*: what is meant is to turn "to *tawḥīd* purely," being "purely inclined to it [i.e. the *dīn*]" (*Tafsīr al-Samarqandī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2014), 11). The strong focus on God's oneness also appears in his remarks on 7:172 (cf. ibid., 579). Additionally, al-Māturīdī records several options of what a *ḥanīf* might be (i.e. somebody who is already a Muslim or merely inclined towards the religion at all times (cf. *Tāwīlāt ahl al-sunna* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2005), 271).

[38] That the *dīn* and the *milla* are quite equivalent we can see well in ʾAbū al Layth al-Samarqandī, who speaks of the call to follow both (*Tafsīr al-Samarqandī*, 11). He further explains this *fiṭra* as the 'disposition (*khilqa*),' which is a term that becomes more popular towards and during the middle period (see p.14, as well as my discussion of the middle period below).

[39] A rare exception comes from al-Qummī, who understands the *fiṭra* to explicitly mean the *shahāda,* including a reference to Ali as "*ʾamīr al-muʾminīn*" (*Tafsīr al-Qummī* (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 2014), 781). However, in summary, he also believes that this amounts to "*al-tawḥīd*" (ibid.). Interestingly and relatedly, his comments on 7:172 do not make reference to 30:30 or *fiṭra.*

[40] Across periods, those who do include: Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, al-Rummānī, al-Māturīdī, Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, Shaykh Ṭabarsi, Ibn Kathīr, al-Brūsawī, Ibn ʿĀshūr, and Ṭabāṭabāʾi.

[41] His real name is a matter of dispute though he is said to have narrated over 5000 sayings.

[42] See, for example, the *tafsīr* of ʾAbū al Layth al-Samarqandī; he also quotes one transmitted by ʾAbū Dawūd (*Kitāb al-sunna,* no. 4716) which connects the *fiṭra* with the primordial covenant: "Everyone who is born is born on the fitra because he testified on the day of the covenant (*mīthāq*)" (*Tafīr al-Samarqandī,* 11).

[43] For a discussion of a several of these options see al-Māturīdī's *Tāwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 270.

as well as over the identity of those 'who do not know,' mentioned at the end of the verse (though most do in fact agree that these are the unbelievers of Mecca).

A basic but illustrative reading of the verse comes from Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,[44] who argues that the *fiṭra* mentioned in the verse is the "*milla* of Islam [which is] *tawḥīd* (*milla al-ʾislām al-tawḥīd*) upon which he created them."[45] According to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, God then made the covenant with Adam's seed, making them testify regarding his lordship and their knowledge of him.[46] The mention of 'no change' in 30:30 according to him means that there is no turning away from the religion or way (*dīn*) of Allāh, which is "Islam (*al-ʾislām*)."[47] The right 'religion' that is mentioned in the latter part of the verse again is "*tawḥīd*"[48] and the majority of people who 'do not know' thusly are the unbelievers of Mecca, who are unaware of the "*tawḥīd*."[49]

Al-Ṭabarī's commentary gives a little more meat to these bones and presents what has to be regarded as the widespread consensus on the topic by the 10th century C.E.[50] His commentary holds not merely an important position in the history of *tafsīr* but also represents one of the oldest commentaries. It circulated in complete form between 896 and 903 but parts might have been available much earlier as "al-Ṭabarī was acknowledged as one of the foremost scholars of his day" and this work was "instantly recognized by his contemporaries as an important work."[51] It seems very possible that Farābī already was familiar with it. In al-Ṭabarī's commentary on 30:30, *fiṭra* by itself refers to the craftmanship of God (*ṣināʿa*), invoking the linguistic analyses I referred to

[44] Translations are from and references are to the following edition: *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003).
[45] *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, 11.
[46] In his comments on 7:172, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān does not directly refer to 30:30 or the *fiṭra.*
[47] *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, 11. The exact meaning of this inability to change (and what exactly cannot change) will become a locus of interest as time progresses (see below).
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Translations are from and references are to the following edition: *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2014).
[51] Feres Hamza and Sajja Rizvi (eds.), *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries,* 1: 28.

in the introduction.[52] The verse's overall message, in agreement with the majority of commentators, is that God made humans on this *fiṭra*, which is the *ḥanīfi dīn* (which in turn means the one that is characterized by straight/upright/correct (*mustaqīm*) obedience).[53] He then quotes Yūnus[54] that this *fiṭra* is the Islam Adam and his descendants were created upon (quoting both 7:172 and 2:213 ("Mankind was a single community [before their deviation];").[55] It is noteworthy, additionally, that al-Ṭabarī already records some variety regarding the conception of the 'no change' clause.[56] While he appears to believe that what is meant here is that it is neither "suitable (*yaṣluḥ*)" nor "proper (*yanbaghī*)"[57] to change the *dīn* of Allāh, there is disagreement on this point. While many say there is no changing the *dīn* of Allāh, some take this reference to 'no change in the creation (*khulq*) of Allāh' to refer to livestock (*bahāʾim*),[58] including some very reliable people.[59] Returning to the last part of the verse, al-Ṭabarī affirms that the religion that one is being called to is the one that has "no bend (*ʿawaj*) away from uprightness (*istiqāma*) in it that [moves it] from the *ḥanīfi* [religion] to that of Judaism and Christianity."[60] It is free from "errors (*ḍalālāt*), innovations/heresies (*bidaʿ muḥdatha*)."[61] Unfortunately, most people do not know that the religion or path (*dīn*) that God orders Muḥammad to at the beginning of the verse is indeed "the

[52] For a full discussion of al-Ṭabarī''s comments on 30:30 see Gobillot, *La fiṭra,* 46-49.
[53] Cf. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 49.
[54] Based on a longer version of his name on p. 50, this seems to be ʿAbd-Allāh ibn Abī Isḥāq al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 117), who is generally considered to be the first grammarian of the Arabic language (alternatively, it might be the narrator Yūnis b. ʿAbd al-ʾAʿla (d. 877/8) quoted in his comments on 7:172.
[55] Cf. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 49. Apparently, the claim that the *fiṭra* is Islam is also supported by the narrator Muḥammad ibn ʿAmr ʿAṭāʾ (cf. ibid.). In order to elucidate what that means in more detail, al-Ṭabarī quotes authorities that name such things as fidelity (*ʾikhlāṣ*), prayer (*ṣalā*), obedience (*ṭāʿa*), chasity (*ʿiṣma*) (cf. ibid., 50).
[56] Though non-regarding a possible prohibition. ʾAbū al Layth al-Samarqandī offers a slightly different reading, arguing that when God has created something, "there is no one qualified to change his disposition (lam yakun li-ʾaḥa an yughayyir)" (*Tafsīr al-Samarqandī,* 11). And al- Māturīdī notes that the Muʿtazila do think there is change because they believe the acts of humans are not created (*Tāwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 272). But for him, this is of course a deceitful reading he strongly disagrees with. He also records that some think that 'no change' refers to the signs that point to his oneness and witness (*shahāda*) of his lordship (cf. ibid.).
[57] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 50.
[58] Cf. ibid., 51.
[59] This position is traditionally attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās. It will come up more frequently later.
[60] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 51.
[61] Ibid.

true religion (*haqq*)"[62] with the other religions ranking clearly below it. The details of al-Ṭabarī's more basic claim are thus clear: Islam is the religion of Allāh, the *ḥanīf* religion that is in accordance with human creation and others innovate/bend away from it.[63] In addition, we already see hints of the issues of whether such bending is permitted and inferior.

The Murjiʾī Yaḥya ibn Sallām provides a third example of a reading of Qur'an 30:30. He makes a lot of the episode recorded in 7:172 and, characteristically, has a strong predestinarian bend.[64] After quoting al-Kalbī (d. 670), who argues that the *dīn* the verse calls to is that of M/muslims ("*musliman*"),[65] the *fiṭra* upon which humans were created is to be linked to both the fact that God in the beginning ordered that the destiny of all until the Day of Judgment be written down, as well the fact that God took the seeds of Adam from the spines and made them testify to his lordship.[66] He then quotes different authorities regarding the three or four groups of people excluded from the reckoning on the Last Day.[67] It appears clear that those alone have an excuse, the rest can expect the proper punishment for breaking the covenant. Yaḥya ibn Sallām finally returns to his explication of 30:30, in which, in accordance with the explicit connection with 7:172, he emphasizes predestination and a firm boundary between believers and unbelievers. The mentioned 'creation of Allāh' that knows no change is the "*dīn* of Allāh."[68] We are to interpret that

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[62] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,* 52.
[63] In his comments on 7:172 al-Ṭabarī quotes one authority (the narrator Yūnis b. ʿAbd al-ʾAʿla (d. 877/8), 141) that connects the first pact with the *ḥadīth* by ʾAbū Hurayra; and another (Ibn ʿAbbās, down a chain of transmitters, cf. 143) that sees the primordial covenant as the *fiṭra* mentioned in 30:30.
[64] Translations are from and references are to the following edition: *Tafsīr Yaḥya ibn Sallām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004). I should add, the Murjiʾīs are known for claiming that one can be a true believer solely on the basis of one's faith (*ʾīmān*) (cf. Feres Hamza and Sajja Rizvi (eds.), *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries,* 1: 24). I may further add that the ʾIsmāʿīlī Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī in his thoughts on 7:172 similarly focuses on unchangeable decision God decrees for each and all from the beginning (Cf. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Riyad: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1999), 1612-14). As far as I can tell, his commentary on 30:30 is not extant. His father's (ʾAbū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 934-5)) theological lexicon, *Kitāb al-zīna* (Sanaʿa: Markaz al-Dirāsat, 1994) does not discuss the meaning of the term '*fiṭra*' (as far as I can tell).
[65] *Tafsīr Yaḥya ibn Sallām,* 655.
[66] Cf. Ibid.
[67] Including those who died before the advent of Islam, were too senile to comprehend it, or deaf (cf. ibid., 658).
[68] *Tafsīr Yaḥya ibn Sallām,* 658.

dīn as referring to the steadfast believers who cannot be led astray, keeping in mind several other verses: Qur'an 18:17 ("those people God guides are rightly guided"), 16: 99 ("He has no power over those who believe and trust in their Lord"), and 15: 42 ("you will have no power over my servants"). By contrast, those who 'do not know' are simply the "*mushrikūn*," rather than the specific, historic group of Meccans. This commentator thus makes a lot of divine predestination and subsequently more firm boundaries between believers and disbelievers, without greatly straying from the consensus reading of 30:30.[69]

A final option that is worth highlighting in the early period is a reading of *fiṭra* as innate disposition (*khilqa*) for knowledge of God and his lordship and what that might mean. The issue at stake here is what we might describe as a gradient of certainty, between knowledge and a mere preparedness or tendency. Thus al-Māturīdī's exegesis of Qur'an 30:30 claims that there are three ways of understanding the *fiṭra:* first, as "the knowledge of God he molded/kneaded (*jaballa*) the people upon;"[70] which means God "placed in every small person and child knowledge of the oneness of his lord and his lordship,"[71] comparable to the knowledge he placed in them regarding the food and sustenance that their mothers' breasts supply to them in their childhood. We may thus, most strongly, speak of an inbuilt, instinctive knowledge of God's existence and rule. On such a reading, the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra would mean that humans, just like the mountains

[69] Al-Hawwarī closely studied the commentary of Ibn Sallām and corrected it in line with his Khārijīsm, adding an emphasis on the necessity of works (*ʿamal*) over pure faith as affirmed by the Murjiʾīs (cf. Feres Hamza and Sajja Rizvi (eds.), *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries,* 1: 23f). Al-Hawwarī spends an even larger amount of time on the question of predestination, including the fate of children (*Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 322-24). He affirms ibn Sallām's reading that from the time of the covenant described in 7:172, people are destined either to happiness or a wretched fate, based on God's assignment in the 'first book' of destiny (cf. Ibid., 322f). However, he adds that the children of believers are with their parents in heaven, quoting *Sura* 52: 21 ("We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith"). Al-Hawwarī then turns to the question of the fate of the children of the unbelievers (*mushrikūn*), citing multiple authorities (including ʾAbū Hurayra's *ḥadīth*) in support of the fact that they are in heaven. This addendum to ibn Sallām fits well with the general impression of al-Hawwarī seeking to highlight the relevance of works, i.e. the ability of adults to choose their destiny (and, by implication, the innocence of children before a certain age).

[70] *Tāwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 271.

[71] Ibid.

that are created with a knowledge of praising and glorifying their lord, know their creator and his praiseworthiness but parents make their children resemble themselves and divert them (from this knowledge). A second option is less strong: God created and molded humans in such a way that if they desist from change, they would become what they were created and molded upon as he "created each of them and placed in each a disposition (*khilqa*) indicating his oneness and lordship."[72] What the *ḥadīth* thus means is that everyone is born "upon that disposition (*khilqa*) which points them to and witness to Allāh's oneness and his lordship that they shall attain if they leave it in peace and free so that it can demonstrate to them and to their senses (*ʿuqūl*)."[73] Rather than a full knowledge, instinctive like the knowledge that our mothers' breasts nourish us, the *fiṭra* is a disposition—a reading that would become more influential as time went on. The third option is even less strong as humans are created for a trial or test (*imtiḥān*).[74] The final clause, referring to the straight religion allows God to tell us that this is the straight religion by "evidence (*hujaj*) and proof (*barāhīn*), unlike those of the unbelievers (*kafara*)."[75]

There are two things to highlight in this early period: a broad consensus that understands *fiṭra* to refer to an inborn knowledge of God's religion or way of life and thus his oneness; and a general progression in terms of complexity, theological significance, and religious boundaries that reflects broader trends in the conception of the term *fiṭra* across the commentators of the earlier period and those that follow it. By this I mean a growing interest in the question of predestination, the idea that rather than a full-blown knowledge or natural certainty, *fiṭra* provides a disposition

[72] *Tāwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 271.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Cf. ibid. It is not exactly clear to me which reading al-Māturīdī favors but in his comments on 7:172 he affirms that during this episode all creation testified to itself that it is their lord who made them and they do not have another and that there is nothing like him; it is truly an inborn knowledge that comes from God to all in the womb (cf. 83). Since there is no reference to the further certainty of this knowledge, I am tempted to see the second of the three possible options as most likely.
[75] *Tāwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 271.

(*khilqa*); further, the question of religious boundaries, and the potential change that other religions cause to the original creation. As we will see in the following section, commentators in the coming centuries will further explore the depths and breadth of these issues, all while—individual excursions aside—generally following the broad consensus that seems to have been assumed and perpetuated from the earliest period.

ii) Phase II: The middle period (11th – 15th century)

This period is by far the largest in terms of timespan and available commentaries. For the middle period I consulted the following thinkers and works: ʾAbū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021), an early Sufi from Nishapur; the classical Sunni commentary of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035/6); ʾAbū al-Qāsim ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 1044), a famous Shīʿi scholar from Baghdad and student of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbar and Shaykh Mufīd; ʾAbū al-Hasan ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Habīb al-Māwardī (d. 1058), a Shāfiʿī jurist seen as having Muʿtazili leanings; the twelver Shīʿi ʾAbū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ḥasan al-Tūsī (d. 1067); al-Wāhidī (d. 1075), who like his teacher al-Thaʿlabī worked for a 'kalāmization' which culminated in al-Rāzī; al-Baghawī (d.1122); ʾAbū'l-Futūḥ Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Rāzī (d.1131), a leading Shīʿi exegete of his time; al-Zamakhshari's (d. 1144) famous Muʿtazili commentary, considered second only to al-Ṭabarī; Ibn ʿAtiyya (d. 1151), who wrote a popular commentary in al-Andalus; ʾAbū ʿAlī Faḍl ibn Hasan Ṭabresi (also known as Shaykh Ṭabarsi) (d. 1153), who wrote a twelver commentary, popular among Sunnis and Shīʿis alike; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ʾAbū'l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), a highly influential Ḥanbalī from Baghdad; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210), who wrote *the* classical theological commentary; the Andalusian mystic Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240); Ibn Kathīr (d.

1373), a historian from Mamluk Syria who was taught by Ibn Taymiyya and is highly regarded by Salafis today; Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), a Mālikī from Cordoba whose *tafsīr* is and was very popular; and finally the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Maḥallī (d. 1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʾAbī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, a very accessible commentary and probably one of the most popular to this day.

Shaykh Ṭabarsi offers a representative account of the Qur'anic *fiṭra* and some of its attending questions in the middle period.[76] First, *fiṭra* is "the *milla,* which is the *dīn,* and the Islam, and the *tawḥīd* that God created upon and for and with, meaning for its sake and for adherence to it."[77] He then invokes the *ḥadīth* of ʾAbū Hurayra,[78] which shows that human creation is done in a way that points people to the fact that they have a maker, and someone who destines them; this person is one, nobody is beside him, and it is forbidden to associate him with anything.[79] The 'no change' clause refers to the *dīn* of Allāh, which constantly askes people for *tawḥīd*, justice (*ʿadl*)

[76] References are to and translations from his *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an* ([?]: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1963). Al-Tūsī in his *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Qom: al-Mu'assasa, 1413 [1992]) fully replicates this, for example. Humans are created for "Islam and *tawḥīd*" (*al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* 512); the *dīn* of Allah is the religion of *tawḥīd*, justice and purity of worship; there is disagreement over whether it is forbidden to change it; but it is certainly "necessary to follow" (ibid.) it.

[77] *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*, 303. Some just speak of the *fiṭra* as disposition for the *milla* and *dīn* of Islam, without explicitly invoking *tawḥīd,* such as ʾAbū'l-Futūḥ Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Rāzī (*Rawd al-jinan wa rawh al-janan* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Islāmīyeh, 1382 [1963]), 50). However, he is very clear that the no 'change' is indeed a prohibition, though in the context of altering divine creation (cf. ibid., 51). Similarly, al-Wāhīdī argues that the *fiṭra* is the *milla* of Islam and change is prohibited (cf.433). However, when discussing the 'straight' religion, he argues that this religion is the one of *tawḥīd* and equally, those who 'do not know' are unaware of "the *tawḥīd* of Allāh" (*al-Wasīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-mājid* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), 433). Al-Thaʿlabi, rather speaks of the "*ḥanīfi dīn*" in his definition of *fiṭra;* however, he is clear that any change to it is unsuitable and indeed prohibited (*al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār Ehia al-Tourath al-ʿArabī, 2002), 301). He also records an interesting minor opinion: that the *fiṭra* humans are created upon is poverty (cf. ibid., 303; al-Qurṭubī (*al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 30) also quotes this option)). Al-Jawzī also thinks that change to the *fiṭra* is forbidden, whether it is indeed the *dīn* of Allāh or the castration of animals (cf. *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994), 158); this position is consistently ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās in the majority of commentaries that mention it).

[78] So do al-Thaʿlabī, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Tūsī, and ʾAbū'l-Futūḥ Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Rāzī.

[79] *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an,* 303. This description of what it means to know God by *fiṭra* is quite common; versions can be found, for example, in al-Māwardī (*Al-Nukat wa al-ʾuyūn: Tafsīr al-Māwardī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 312) and Qurṭubī (*al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: [?], 1976), 31).

and purification of worship.[80] Shaykh Ṭabarsi then notes that there is some disagreement among different *mufassirūn* regarding the question of whether there is a prohibition here (and of what, i.e. tempering with livestock or with one's religion) or a simple statement of God's steadfastness (meaning there simply is no change); or whether an affirmation that it is not *possible* to change it. In either case, it is clear that we must follow the straight (*mustaqīm*) religion.[81] Al-Māwardī offers us another, representative sample of comments in this vein, providing us with a succinct overview of many of the possible issues that came up with regard to Qur'an 30:30 during this period. This includes the assertion that, as in the classical period, *fiṭra* is the *dīn* of Allāh and his *tawḥīd*, as well as an interest in the meaning of the 'no change' clause.[82]

Besides this general narrative, some commentators exhibit particular emphases worth highlighting as they demonstrate some of the diversity across the predominant consensus during this period. The famous mystic Ibn ʿArabī,[83] for example, reads *fiṭra* not merely as *tawḥīd* but as a purity thereof. The verse calls for a total focus on "the religion of tawhid, which is the way of the truth," letting go of everything else.[84] What the verse means when it calls to 'turn to' the religion is to take one's self or one's being with all its parts: thus "stripping oneself of anything other than the truth, existing in tawhid and standing with the truth, not turning towards oneself and

[80] *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an,* 303.
[81] Ibid., 330. In his comments on 7:172, Shaykh Ṭabarsi then connects the two verses, pointing out that according to one reading, the covenant established with the seeds means that all are formed upon "Islam, which is the first *fiṭra*" (*Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an,* 496) that the unbelievers change away from.
[82] He records two options for understanding the *fiṭra* of Allāh: "the creation (*sināʿa*) of Allāh upon which he created the people;" or "the *dīn* of Allāh upon which he created his creature […] by which they mean Islam" (*Al-Nukat wa al-ʿuyūn: Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, 312). There are three common options to read the 'no change' clause: "there is no changing the *dīn* of Allāh;" or "there is no changing the creation of Allāh such as castrating livestock;" or "do not replace God as the creator, so somebody else created what Allāh created, because the creator is the one who creates and a creature other than him does not create" (ibid.); as well as possibly a fourth, there is no change in those creatures that are happy and those that misfortune befell (i.e. predestination). Then we see two options for the 'straight religion:' either it is meant as a praise; or as a reference that this is right justice. Finally, those who 'do not know' are a reference to "people do not understand and do not know that they have a creator worthy of worship" (ibid.).
[83] References are to and translations are from the following edition: *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-karīm* ([Beirut]: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabīya, 1968).
[84] *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-karīm*, 261.

not towards anything else."[85] This way one can become one with Allāh, and his religion and his creed (*ṭarīqa*).[86] Then only does one exist as '*ḥanīf*,' "inclined to be repelled by the false religions" which are deviant and opposite and associate God with others.[87] *Fiṭra* here is the "condition/ state (*ḥāla*) upon which the human truth was created, namely purity (*ṣafāʾ*) and freedom (*tajarrud*) in eternity."[88] This condition or state never changes, the first 'purity' always remains "nothing but pure *fiṭri tawḥīd*."[89] Ibn ʿArabī rounds off his reading of *fiṭra* by emphasizing again that "that first *fiṭra* is nothing but the most holy abundance (*al-fayḍ al-ʾaqdas*)" which is the source of existence and "the one who remains on it does not deviate from *tawḥīd* and does not veil the truth."[90] If corruption or veiling occurs, it is the result of custom (*ʿāda*)[91] While he thus affirms the general strokes of the commentators' consensus, Ibn ʿArabī's use of the term not only inflects it with and relates it to his own mystical interests but, as a result, also broadens the kinds of issues invoked.[92]

The comments of the important theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's are equally worth mentioning.[93] He takes his, quite standard, thoughts on *fiṭra* (as the "*tawḥīd* God created the people upon when he took them from the spine of Adam and asked them, am I not your Lord? and they said, yes"[94]) in an interesting direction. Arguing that the *fiṭri* faith (*ʾīmān*) that even the heavens and the earth have (i.e. they recognize their creator) is not enough, he expands on the idea that "God created his creatures for his worship and all of them are his slaves."[95] The 'no change' thus

[85] *Tafsīr al-Qurʿan al-karīm,* 262.
[86] Cf. ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] *Tafsīr al-Qurʿan al-karīm*, 262.
[91] Cf. Ibid.
[92] For another more bodily focused reading see also al-Sulamī (*Haqāʾiq al-tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), 125).
[93] References are to and translations from the following edition: *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Mafatih al-ghayb)* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).
[94] *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* 120f.
[95] Ibid., 121.

means that their being slaves to God is never like the being of the mamluks, "who are slaves to another human being and move from one thing to another and can object to/disagree their subjection by emancipation; rather, there is no objection/disagreement for the creature with the worship and servitude."[96] So the 'no change' refers to the fact that "all are slaves and there is no escape from that."[97] While absolutely in line with the standard emphases regarding what it means to be a *ḥanīf,* Rāzī focuses on the implications of humans as servants of God, created for his worship, thus adding another dimension to the issues of interest during the middle period.[98]

In the interest of the relation between the commentators and the philosophers, I want to emphasize that during this period, we can also discern a certain variety of opinions when it comes to the question of the reliability or effectiveness of *fiṭra*. On the one hand, there is thus, as I have noted, a greater interest in the notion of the *khilqa* or disposition during this time. Zamakhsharī, for example, speaks of *fiṭra* only as a 'disposition' (*khilqa*). As a result, what the verse tells us is that "[God] created them for accepting *tawḥīd* and the *dīn* of Islam, not to keep away from it or deny it." [99] While this is different from saying that *fiṭra* indeed *is* the *tawḥīd* and the *dīn* of Islam, it also does not deny that Islam naturally 'offers an answer to the mind' and 'brings a right vision,' until it is changed to something else. Similarly, his reading of the 'no change' is less strong: it is simply not appropriate (*yanbaghi*) to replace or change that *fiṭra.* Ibn ʿAtiyya is one who compares the *maṣdar* '*fiṭra* of Allāh' to the 'color (*ṣibgha*) of Allāh' of Qur'an 2:138. Additionally, citing disagreement over the meaning of the term *fiṭra*, he adopts a reading that understands it as "disposition (*khilqa*) or the organization (*ḥayʾa*) in the souls of children which prepares and

[96] *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* 121.
[97] Ibid.
[98] It is worth noting that Ṭabāṭabāʾi (*al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* ([Beirut]: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī: 1970), 181) explicitly disagrees with this reading of the 'no change clause.'
[99] *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2015), 463f. The *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2001) also simply affirms that the *fiṭra* is the human disposition (*khilqa*) for the *dīn* and to change it means to commit *shirk* (cf. *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 535).

destines them for by it they distinguish the attributes of God and by it infer his lordship and by it know his revelation/religious law and believe by it." [100]

Ibn Kathīr,[101] on the other hand, makes the connection between *fiṭra,* the *ḥanīfi* religion, the *ḥadīth* of ʾAbū Hurayra, and the covenant of 7:172 very clear (close to what many modern commentators would say): God created humans "on Islam,"[102] then they turned away. The 'straight' religion is thus that of "adherence to the *sharīʿa*" and the healthy *fiṭra* is the upright religion.[103] Similarly, in his comments on 7:172 he highlights that the covenant, the *ḥanīfi* religion, Qur'an 30:30, and the prophetic saying recorded by ʾAbū Hurayra are intimately connected.[104] However, in his reading the episode makes a clear distinction between those who will believe and those who will not (which he sees supported not merely by the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra but also Qur'an 6:133 ["just as He produced you from the offspring of other people"] and 165 ["It is He who made you successors on the earth"]; as well as 27: 62 ["Who makes you successors on the earth"]).[105] While some witness to their coming belief, others do so for their unbelief. *Fiṭra,* a powerful force in human life, does not appear equal for all here and rather supports a predestinarian reading.[106]

On the latter point, the issue of predestination, I should also point out that during the middle period the question of predestination comes up for several commentators in different ways.[107]

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[100] *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitab al-ʿazīz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993-1995), 336.
[101] References are to the following edition: *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm (Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr)* (Riyadh: Dār al-Tibāʾ, 1998).
[102] *Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr,* 313.
[103] Ibid., 316f.
[104] Cf. *Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr,* 500-507.
[105] Cf. ibid., 507.
[106] This conception of unequal *fiṭar* offers a potential connection with the philosophers' understanding; or at the very least shows the possibility of various readings.
[107] For a broader survey of Muslim views on the fate of children in the afterlife, whether Muslim and non-Muslim, and with occasional reference to *fiṭra,* see Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 168-182. As they note, thinkers are generally careful about fate of those who died before they reach age of legal obligation and seem, as we have seen, more comfortable to say that the children of believers will be in heaven. However, there is, as the commentaries indeed reflect, some variety in the prophetic sayings regarding the fate of the children of the unbelievers, with opinions

Thus, al-Wāhīdī[108] argues that rather than referring to the disposition of all, the *fiṭra* mentioned here only applies to the believers, with the disbelievers being created on a different one. Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā also reports such an opinion (i.e. that rather than humanity all being born on the first covenant of the *fiṭra,* some are born on unbelief and some on belief);[109] however, he explicitly disagrees with it since it would then make it unreasonable to expect belief from all.[110] Rather, a unbelief or a different religion are acquired, mostly because of parental guidance.[111] ʾAbū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī speaks of Islam as the "clear path for the people of truth (*ḥaqāʾiq*), quoting the opinion cited by several others that what humans are created upon by their *fiṭra* is their eternal destiny in terms of happiness and misfortune (*saʿāda wa shaqāwa*).[112] Al-Baghawī,[113] with reference to the *ḥadīth* of ʾAbū Hurayra, claims that the majority believe that Qur'an 30:30 speaks of the believers (*muʾminūn*) who are created upon Islam. Al-Qurṭubī too believes that we are to read the 'no change' to mean God's predestining of people's state in terms of happiness or wretchedness; the happy do not become damned and vice versa.[114] There is thus some variety on

ranging from 'all are in hell to,' to 'all are in heaven because they innocent and God knows best what they have done' (with several possible grades in between; cf. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection,* 175ff).

[108] Cf. *al-Wasīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-mājid* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), 433.

[109] Cf. *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-karīm* (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Sibṭayn al-ʿĀlamīya, 1430 [2009]),188. He also notes a frequently quoted opinion, attributed to al-Hasan that the *fiṭra* represents the first creation, before God sent down more detailed demands (ibid., 187).

[110] *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-karīm,* 330. In his *ʿAmālī* (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954) he reiterates this exact same thought (cf. *ʿAmālī,* 85).

[111] *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-karīm,* 330.

[112] *Haqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), 125. Sulamī says this reading goes back to Ibn Aṭāʾ (maybe Ata ibn Abi Rabah (d. 114-115 aH). Al-Māwardī also records it (cf. *Al-Nukat wa al-ʾuyūn: Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, 312).

[113] Cf. *Tafsīr al-Baghawī: 'Ma'ālim al-tanzīl'* ([Riyad]: Dār al-Ṭibāʾ, 1993), 269.

[114] Cf. *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān,* 31. A *ḥadīth* frequently quoted in this context, which is often cited as ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb's (d. 644) interpretation of 7:172, is the following: "Umar says that the Prophet was asked about this verse, and told his audience about an event which had occurred after the creation of Adam: 'When God created Adam, He rubbed his (i.e Adam's) back with His right hand, and pulled out his offspring. And then He said: I have created these for Paradise. Then He rubbed his back again and pulled out his offspring. And then He said: I have created these for Hell'" (for example, Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, 1612). Another, very frequently cited, *ḥadīth* regards the fate of children: 'What about the one who dies before then?' he replied, 'God knows best what happens to them'" (for example, al-Hawwari, *Tafsīr Kitab Allāh al-ʿazīz*, 323).

the question of predestination and the issue is—along with the question of change and the concept of a 'disposition' (*khilqa*)—one of sustained interest during this period.

Finally, a few commentators of the period record a small minority of thinkers who explicitly disagreed with the strongest possible reading, namely that the *fiṭra* is Islam. Thus, Ibn al-Jawzī reports that Ibn Qutayba (d. 889)—of the early period—argued against those who said that the *fiṭra* is Islam. The differences between him and people of *qadar* when it comes to the saying is that they believe that the *fiṭra* is Islam and he believes that it is confirmation of God and knowledge of him and not Islam.[115] What the *ḥadīth* thus speaks of, is thus merely a beginning as *all* in 7:172 testified to Allāh; meaning that all knew they have a creator and ruler and are servant to something, even if they call him by a different name.[116] Taking the *ḥadīth* and the primordial covenant together, all are born with knowledge of this covenant and first confirmation and this is indeed what the *fiṭra* is. Jews then make their children Jewish which means they teach them Judaism and others do the same with their respective faiths. Now since Muslims do not mourn for Jews or Christians and vice versa—but they do mourn for all children— the meaning of the *fiṭra* cannot be Islam or they would not mourn for such a deceased child or bury them. Children born on the *fiṭra* are thus in a state prior to any religious affiliation.

Al-Qurṭubī also offers a more skeptical position regarding the definitiveness of the *fiṭra.*[117] While he argues in his comments on 30:30 that in this verse, the term refers to Islam[118] and in the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra it refers to the *milla,* he notes that there are different readings of *fiṭra* among the *ʿulamā*. Having cited multiple readings of the term *fiṭra* (including Islam, the five

[115] Cf. *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr*, 157. He himself seems to rather agree with the majority, that while *fiṭra* generally is a disposition (*khilqa*), the *fiṭra* of Allāh described here is Islam. Thus, we ought to understand the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra as telling us that what people are created upon, is "faith (*ʾīmān*) in Allāh" (ibid.). He also emphasizes at the end of his comments that the 'straight' *dīn* of Allāh is *tawḥīd* (cf. ibid., 158).
[116] Cf. ibid., 157.
[117] *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: [?], 1976).
[118] Cf. ibid., 24.

prescriptions of Islam, human destiny in terms of happiness or misfortune, a disposition (*khilqa*) for knowledge of God, the covenant of 7:172),[119] as well as listing the most common readings of the 'no change clause,'[120] he argues that the *fiṭra* does not equal Islam, siding with people, such as Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 741, an early transmitter of *aḥadīth*), who emphasized a mere dispositional reading. Like others he sees in his camp, he argues that "it is impossible that the mentioned *fiṭra* is Islam because Islam and faith are proclaiming with the tongue and belief with the heart and doing with the limbs and this is absent in children; thus also there are no believers and disbelievers in children."[121] Unbelief for them is something acquired in the world after reaching maturity, through conscious decision; which is why when the children of unbelievers die, they do so in accordance with the first covenant and not with the status of their parents.[122]

In summary we see that the middle period is characterized by a deeper exploration of the consensus of the earlier commentators. We can still discern a broad affirmation of the idea that Islam is the religion or straight path of the created human being, connecting the *fiṭra* of Qur'an 30:30, the *ḥadīth* of ʾAbū Hurayra, and the episode recorded in 7:172. However, we also saw a variety of emphases and individual interests. Chief among them was concern over the possible readings of the 'no change' clause and the question of predestination. Additionally, commentators disagree over the issue of the reliability or determinativeness of the *fiṭra.* We thus saw much interest in the notion of a disposition (*khilqa*), as well as the question whether the *fiṭri dīn* is in fact Islam. Finally, several commentators develop the standard reading according to their interests, be they spiritual or theological. However, it is important to highlight that these instances are rare. The

[119] Cf. *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān,* 25.
[120] There is no change in the *fiṭra,* meaning the predestined happiness or wretchedness of people; there is no change in the *dīn,* referring to its doctrines; and a possible reading to the prohibition to mutilate animals (cf. *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 31).
[121] *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān,* 28.
[122] Cf. ibid., 28f. In a different project I would like to explore further the change in understanding between the early and middle phase with respect to the 'islam' or 'Islam' that is supposed to be *fiṭri.*

overall impression across place, time, and commentators' professional as well as religious background is that of a strong consensus when it comes to understanding the *fiṭra* mentioned in *Surat al-Rūm,* the issues understood to be connected to it, and even the appropriate responses to these issues.

iii) Phase III: The late period (18th – 20th century)

Approaching the last third of my analysis of *tafsīr*, I want to emphasize that since I primarily seek to reconstruct the early conceptions of *fiṭra,* I did not go to the same breadth or depth for the late period. Additionally, there is an incredible amount of material available for this period. I chose several commentators that appeared both representative and comprehensive enough to reflect a variety of views. Their task in this chapter is mainly for comparison and include: the Ottoman Turkish Sufi Ismāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī al-Brūsawī (d.1725); the reformer al-Shawkānī (d.1840), who converted from Zaydism to Sunnism; the famous Egyptian Sunni Islamist Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966); the Tunisian reformer Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973); and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾi (d. 1981), one of most prominent Shīʿi thinkers of the 20th century. The most noticeable but relatively unsurprising finding in these works is their length; additionally, they share a reading of the 'no change' clause as a prohibition. Finally, there is a clear divide between the two that can be broadly construed as 'modern' and the two contemporary or 20th century works of Ibn ʿĀshūr and Ṭabāṭabāʾi. While the former affirm the broad consensus regarding *fiṭra* I have described so far (with the *fiṭra* being the *dīn* of God, which is *tawḥīd*), the latter two take a more rationalist and also more determinative and forceful interpretation that has implications for a theory of religion as well as conceptions of virtue.

Both al-Brūsawī[123] and al-Shawkānī[124] continue the reading that, as we saw, already existed in the early period and became popular during the middle one: that the *fiṭra* is a disposition (*khilqa*). However, for both it is not merely disposition for knowledge of God or his oneness but explicitly for Islam. While this is not unlike some of the opinions we encountered during the middle period, I would say it is a stronger reading than that of a mere disposition. As al-Brūsawī writes, the "*dīn al-haqq* is the *dīn* of Islam."[125] For him, the *ḥanīf* thus not merely focuses on worship of God or *tawḥīd* but is rather inclined to Islam[126] and *fiṭra* is the disposition (*khilqa*) that leads humans to accept "the *tawḥīd* and *dīn* of Islam."[127] For al-Shawkānī, similarly, the verse calls people to not turn away from the *dīn* "towards a false religion,"[128] a worry we also saw in the middle period. *Fiṭra* is a disposition (*khilqa*) and what it means here is that it is a disposition towards the *milla* that is "Islam and tawhid."[129] However, while we might describe both commentators as adopting one of the stronger readings of the middle period, the authors also remain consistent with earlier periods as this disposition is not a certain path but rather a beginning: *fiṭra* is an inclination that needs to be adhered to so that it leads to Islam, for humans can be led astray.[130] This is despite the fact that all, in line with what ʾAbū Hurayra reported, are born on the healthy *jibilla* and *khilqa* and *fiṭra* and *ṭabʿ*,[131] which means that they are prepared to accept the one religion they are meant to. And if they leave it unchanged, they will continue on it and will

[123] References are to and translations are from the following edition: *Rūḥ al-bayān* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Būlāq, [1870]); this is a translation, I believe, as the original commentary was written in Ottoman (?).
[124] References are to and translations are from the following edition: *Fataḥ al-qadīr* (al-Manṣūra: Dār al-Wafāʾ lil-Ṭibāʿah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 1994).
[125] *Rūḥ al-bayān,* 471.
[126] Cf. ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] *Fataḥ al-qadīr,* 216.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Cf. *Rūḥ al-bayān,* 472 and *Fataḥ al-qadīr*, 217. Al-Shawkānī offers a lot of legal and linguistic analysis as well as many classical opinions, including those according to which some are already born as unbelievers (cf. *Fataḥ al-qadīr*, 217).
[131] Cf. al-Brūsawī*, Rūḥ al-bayān,* 472.

perceive the religion as good; and if they alter it, they will turn to sin.[132] In line with the slightly stronger reading of a *khilqa* for Islam, both commentators read the 'no change' clause to mean that it is forbidden to break away from the *fiṭra*.[133] While all are created upon *tawḥīd*, most people are like the disbelievers of Mecca, they deviate from what is straight due to lack of thinking about it[134] or until they actually know and adopt the straight religion.[135] The stronger emphasis of a disposition for Islam might explain this stronger reading of the 'no change' clause since deviation from the *fiṭra* could thus be linked to unbelief. In either case, neither their reading of *fiṭra* nor of the 'no change' clause mean a break with the middle period. Instead, both commentators remain consistent with the consensus we have seen so far. It is noteworthy, however, that both do, without much comment, adopt the idea of a disposition for Islam and, maybe with it, a prohibitive reading of the 'no change' clause that was merely one option in previous centuries.

A clearer departure from the consensus occurs with the two 20th century thinkers I consulted. *Fiṭra* is now the specific guidance that humanity (like any other creature) received from God, that is the intellect (*ʿaql*)—or what some might call a form of natural law. Additionally, and seemingly in line with the trend I noted in the other two modern commentators, there is a great focus on the particularity of *Islam* as the right religion and the need to avoid *shirk.* Two things thus seem true: rather than simply recite what is in the scriptural tradition, these thinkers draw on a much wider pool of sources; and second, emphasis on Islam as the one natural religion and the

[132] Here follows in al-Brūsawī a discussion of the destiny of children who all have a *fiṭri* faith their parents alter; he also records different opinions regarding the importance of the mother's or the father's religion in the upbringing of children (cf. *Rūḥ al-bayān* 472). The belief that if left alone, people will naturally turn to Islam is not foreign to the middle period but rarely as clearly emphasized.
[133] Cf. al-Shawkānī, *Fataḥ al-qadīr*, 217 and al-Brūsawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān,* 473.
[134] cf. al-Brūsawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān,* 473
[135] Cf. al-Shawkānī, *Fataḥ al-qadīr*, 217. In line with such a rather harsh reading, al-Brūsawī writes in his commentary on 7:172 that as the primordial covenant confirms God's oneness and lordship, we cannot deny it. Humans were molded on the *fiṭra* and knowledge of the truth, allowing no apology or ignorance (cf. *Rūḥ al-bayān*, 371).

significance of attending lines of religious difference seems much clearer.[136] As a result, the focus seems to shift: from a more inclusive or generous reading of the idea of the *fiṭra* which envisages monotheism as natural per se; to a more divisive reading in which emphasis is placed on the particularity of Islam as the most appropriate relation to God for humanity.

Turning to Ibn ʿĀshūr's commentary first, it is noteworthy how important the connections between Qur'an 30:30 and 7:172 are for him.[137] In his commentary on the latter he explicitly discusses *fiṭra* as the seat of the primordial covenant; and in his discussion of 30:30 the primordial covenant immediately shows up as well.[138] His reading of our verse in *Surat al-Rūm* in particular highlights the naturalness of Islam as the religion of the *fiṭra.* He argues that the mentioned '*fiṭra* of Allāh' is a substitute for the descriptor '*ḥanīfi*,' which thus shows the two most important characteristics of the *dīn* of Islam, namely desisting from shirk and being in agreement with the *fiṭra*: "the *dīn* is the *fiṭra* of Allāh because *tawḥīd* is the *fiṭra* and *shirk* is a change to the *fiṭra.*"[139] Being created on the *fiṭra* thus means humans are made "receptive to the rulings of this religion and its precepts (*taʿālīm*) are appropriate to their disposition (*khilqa*),"[140] rather than burdensome. The *fiṭra* is thus like "a confirmation of God's oneness because *tawḥīd* accompanies the mind and the straight point of view to the point that if man were to consider and think about it, and were not to be instructed in an erroneous belief, he would be guided to *tawḥīd* by his *fiṭra.*"[141] While these assertions, the strong emphasis on *shirk* aside perhaps, are still within the broad consensus we have seen, Ibn ʿĀshūr now moves beyond it. For given this natural coherence between the created

[136] Thus, Ibn ʿĀshūr's discussion of the *ḥanīfi* religion emphasizes its avoiding the defects of *shirk* and abstaining from sin by being focused on God like Abraham.
[137] Translations are from and references are to the following edition: *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr* ([Tunis]: al-Dār al-Tūnisīya, 2008).
[138] Cf. *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr,* 89.
[139] Ibid., 89f.
[140] Ibid., 90.
[141] Ibid.

human disposition and the tenets of Islam, the best explanation of what *fiṭra* is, is indeed not Islam but "the *s*ystem (*niẓām*) which God has placed in every creature."[142] Thus, it is what "confers the type [of creature that the] human being [is] and what God created for it in terms of body and mind."[143] So, the human being walks by his *bodily fiṭra;* and by his *ʿaqli fiṭra* he solves issues and infers consequences from causes and results from prefaces (as well as identifies misleading sophistry). Ibn ʿĀshūr acknowledges that in this reading he takes a lead from what Ibn Sīnā wrote in his famous thought experiment in the *Kitāb al-Najāt.*[144] As a result, saying that Islam is the 'the *fiṭra* of Allāh' thus means that the source of belief flows from the requirements of the *ʿaqli fiṭra*.[145] Similarly, legislation is either also *fiṭri* (flowing from the intellect) or the *fiṭra* does not disagree with it. Even commercial laws go back to what the *fiṭra* testifies, though he admits that he explains this correlation between the laws and the *fiṭra* much better in his book on the *maqāṣid* (*Maqāṣid al-sharīʿa al-islāmiyya*).[146]

After showing his particular reading of *fiṭra* as a divine system, Ibn ʿĀshūr turns to the second emphasis of his commentary: the issue of different religions. For despite claiming the coherence of Islam and the *fiṭra*, Ibn ʿĀshūr is not naïve regarding the obvious absence of general agreement on this point (i.e. the entire world is in fact not Muslim (or even monotheistic) or follows his vision of law). For him, human society has been afflicted with a long period of deception that had people ensnared in untruths, getting worse over time. Seeing the truth has become hard, save for a few firmly committed to the truth.[147] Clearly counting himself among those who do see, Ibn

[142] *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr,* 90.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Cf. ibid., 91.
[145] Cf. ibid.
[146] He adds the caveat that the testimonies of the *fiṭra* may indeed be clear or hidden, just as Ibn Sīnā had noted. And if the *fiṭri* meaning is hidden or ambiguous, it is the experts who have to work it out (cf. *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr*, 91).
[147] Cf. *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr,* 92.

ʿĀshūr affirms (while the *fiṭra* of Allāh is not simply Islam): "the being of Islam is the *fiṭra,* the close adherence of its rulings/judgments (*aḥkām*) to the requirements (*muqtaḍiyyāt*) of the *fiṭra*; [this coherence between Islam's requirements and those of the *fiṭra* is] a distinguishing feature of Islam among the other religions."[148] Hence, he can say that Islam is "appropriate for all the ages and suitable for all the communities,"[149] assuming "its judgments/rulings are erected upon the foundations of the human *fiṭra.*"[150] On the other hand, as the verse makes clear, God created humans on a *fiṭra* that is inconsistent with false religions and blameworthy customs, which explicitly includes Christianity and Judaism as religions opposed to (*mukhālif*) the *fiṭra*.[151] The 'no change' is then a categorical prohibition (*nafī al-jins*).[152] This strong call to Islam continues in his comments on the last part of the verse as he argues that the reference to most people being ignorant is an answer to those who wonder why the majority of people do not in fact follow Islam. According to Ibn ʿĀshūr, the audience of the verse is thus not merely the Meccan unbelievers but all those who ignore the call of Islam: unbelievers as well the people of the book "since they refused to follow the Prophet and leave their religions after their abolition (*ʾibṭāl*)."[153] Despite broadly affirming the general consensus we have seen during the early and classical period, Ibn ʿĀshūr clearly has moved to other topics of great interest: the uniqueness of Islam as the natural religion of God; and the *fiṭra* as the particular way God created human beings in body and mind.[154]

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[148] *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr,* 92.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid. We do get a little glimpse of these characteristics of the *fiṭri* Islam, chief among them 'kindness' and 'ease' cf. ibid.).
[151] Cf. *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr,* 92. In support of the idea that the human creation was originally fully sound and the fact that all they have in terms of mistakes is due to acquisition and habituation, he quotes ʾAbū Hurayra's report (cf. ibid.).
[152] Cf. ibid., 93.
[153] *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr*, 94. Which according to Ibn ʿĀshūr was mainly due to habituation.
[154] His comments on 7:172 are fully consistent with this. The primordial covenant is for him a covenant of the book. It resides in the "disposition (*jibilla*) of person (*nasama*) and their *fiṭra*" (*Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr*, 166) and thus provides reason for reprimanding the unbelievers. Humans are thus created with an awareness that points them to God's oneness (cf. ibid., 168), making this verse "a reminder to the disbelievers regarding what God placed in the *fiṭra*, namely *tawḥīd*" (ibid., 169). The original formation that we received by *fiṭra* is thus something we shall not

What Ibn ʿĀshūr sadly does not go into is the question of different *fiṭar* as well as details regarding the nature of 'changing' away from the original *fiṭra* through adherence to another religion. Further, it should be clear that unlike thinkers of the early period and more in line with those of the middle and modern one, Ibn ʿĀshūr is explicitly a 'positivist:' he believes that if left alone, humans will eventually turn to Islam.

Ṭabāṭabāʾi in his commentary[155] agrees that Islam is the *dīn* that the human disposition (*khilqa*) is called towards.[156] This *dīn* is thus the path humans ought to follow for their happiness, which is their ultimate goal. While Ṭabāṭabāʾi thus affirms what we have seen as a possible reading in the middle period and the seeming consensus of the late period (i.e. that Islam is the religion of the *khilqa*), he ventures further down the path that Ibn ʿĀshūr's claims regarding the coherence between Islam and human nature had opened. In fact, he posits what some might describe as a theory of 'natural law' when he argues: "and certainly, he has guided all forms of life towards their perfection […] by their *fiṭra* and type of creation. And he equipped their existence with what is the necessary equipment for the goal."[157] Then he quotes Qur'an 20: 50 ("[He] said, 'Our Lord is He who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance'") and 87: 2-3 ("who created [all things] in due proportion; who determined their destinies and guided them"). According to Ṭabāṭabāʾi, all creatures are thus created with the means of achieving their perfection as intended by God. And this vision explicitly includes humans: "the human being, like the rest of the created types, is created with a *fiṭra* that guides it towards a perfection of its shortcomings and addresses its needs

forget and there is no excuse for those who do so on the Last Day as the knowledge of God's oneness that is in the *fiṭra* thwarts all excuses regarding forgetfulness (cf. *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr,* 169f). In line with this interest and emphasis on the responsibility of all for their belief, Ibn ʿĀshūr does not discuss the question of the children of unbelievers or even the *ḥadīth* of ʾAbū Hurayra.

[155] References are to and translations are from the following edition: *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* ([Beirut]: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī: 1970).

[156] Cf. *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 178.

[157] *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 178

and alerts it regarding what benefits it and what harms it in its life."[158] Human beings are equipped with what they need for their perfection[159] and what that means concretely is that the human being has "a special (*khāsṣa*) *fitra* that guides it to a special *sunna* in life and a fixed path."[160] It is only if humans follow that path exclusively can they attain their goal. Similar to Ibn ʿĀshūr's explicit claims, Ṭabāṭabāʾi believes that rather than envisaging a diversity of goals, there is one answer to human striving,[161] which is the *fiṭra.* As a result, there is for humanity one established *sunna* with a constancy of its foundation, which is the human being; though it is realized via the detailed *sunan* that take different people and places into account.[162] Overall, however, God created humans in a way that points them to the fact that they have a creator and a ruler and there is a single God that shall not be associated with anything;[163] which is exactly what the *fiṭra* does. Both the broad similarities with Ibn ʿĀshūr's traditional but innovative comments and in general agreement with other modern thinkers as well as the broader tradition are clear: while Ṭabāṭabāʾi affirms that the *fiṭra* is what sets humans up for a life in accordance with the divine will, the implications of such a claim for a theory of religion, conversion, and natural law are much fully explored than in the premodern period.[164]

Given the seemingly shared tendencies of both Ṭabāṭabāʾi and Ibn ʿĀshūr, I should note another modern commentary. Sayyid Quṭb's (d. 1966) *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān* is neither reformist nor

[158] *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 178.
[159] He then quotes *Sura* 91: 7-8 ("[by] the soul and how He formed it and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety"), as well as *Sura* 80: 20 ("He makes the way easy for him") (cf. *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* 178f).
[160] Ibid., 179.
[161] As humanity "is nothing but of one type, there is no disagreement regarding what benefits and harms it from the perspective of his composed structure, namely body and soul. So what is certain is that there is one happiness and one cure for the human being. So, it is necessary that one clear *sunna* guides its work, one firm guide guides it to it [i.e. the happiness]" (*al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 179). Though he does not deny that there is some variety among people; however, such variety is not fundamental. This is an important difference with earlier commentators it seems to me.
[162] Cf. *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 179
[163] Cf. ibid., 180
[164] His comments on 7:172 affirm that while all are born on the *fiṭra* (as ʾAbū Hurayra states) and thus with a knowledge that they have a creator, not all adhere to this in the world (cf. *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 330).

Shīʿi.[165] In some ways, his comments seem more in line with the general premodern consensus discussed above; at the same time, his more judgmental tone when it comes to the question of change to this natural constitution and his interest in other, more scientific discourses related to the question of humanity's natural constitution put him firmly in the modern camp. Finally, he too shows interest in the idea of *fiṭra* as a form of natural law, providing—through the help of the *dīn*— the one answer that serves humanity's striving. In Quṭb's view, Qur'an 30:30 is thus all about the harmony between *fiṭra* and *dīn.* He connects the *fiṭra* of people with "the nature of the religion" (*ṭabīʿat al-dīn*) since "both of them are made by God and both of them agree with the laws of existence and both of them are coordinated with the other in its nature (*ṭabīʿa*) and view (*ittijāh*)."[166] As God created man, so his message sent down to his creation heals human lacks and directs their life. As Quṭb puts it, God is the expert "who knows best what he has created"[167] and like the *fiṭra,* so the *dīn* is firmly established. In line with this idea of an essential harmony between the religion and the nature, he reads the 'no-change' clause to say that "if people deviate from the *fiṭra,* nothing can help them return to it except this *dīn* that is coordinated with the *fiṭra.*"[168] Indeed, Quṭb is very clear about the universal relevance of the *fiṭra* since he adds that this *fiṭra* is not merely the "*fiṭra* of mankind (*bashar*)" but also "the *fiṭra* of existence (*wujūd*)."[169] Finally, for Quṭb the verse's audience, though originally the Prophet, is to be understood as "all believers,"[170] who are called to adhere to the right path. While we thus see the broad connection between the religion of Islam and human nature affirmed, we might note that in his comments on 30:30, Quṭb is less interested in the issue of prohibition. Nevertheless, he clearly taps into similar issues of

[165] Referenes are to and translations are from the following edition: Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1973-1974.
[166] *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān,* 2767.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

general human nature and formation that are best served by Islam much like Ibn ʿĀshūr and Ṭabāṭabāʾi.

In his comments on 7:172, Quṭb links the primordial scene with "the issue of the *fiṭra* and belief (*ʿaqīda*)."[171] And it is here that the question of change receives more attention. According to him, the scene describes a great or profound truth that is anchored in the "depths of the human *fiṭra* and the depths of existence."[172] He connects the idea of the seeds of humanity specifically to the modern biological pictures of cells and genes[173] and what we now know about the interrelation of humanity. Besides the conscious attempt to connect the message of the Qur'an to current life, what is more important is that Quṭb notes that some interpreters have understood the scene to refer to the "conveant of the *fiṭra* (*ʿahd al-fiṭra*),"[174] by which is meant that God "created humans upon the acknowledgement (*iʿtirāf*) of his single lordship."[175] This tendency or awareness he reads along the positivistic lines we are already familiar with, noting that God "entrusted them with this *fiṭra* and they grow up with it, until they deviate from it " via corruption or inclining away from it."[176] While Quṭb had been less interested in the question of blame in his comments on Qur'an 30:30, the issue resurfaces here as he believes this episode indicts those who do not profess the faith despite the fact that God created them on the *fiṭra,* which means "the confirmation of *tawḥīd.*"[177] Humans universally, on account of their *fiṭra,* ought to acknowledge God's oneness and this episode from the Qur'an explains why.

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[171] *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān,* 1392.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Which in their own way affirms the image of certain human characteristics that determine our lives when we are still in the loins of our ancestors (cf. ibid., 1393).
[174] *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān,* 1393.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid., 1394.

In summary we can thus say that the late period shares an understanding of the 'no change' clause as prohibition (or, at the very least, of the indictment that can come from the idea of the *fiṭra*) and, connected to that, a greater emphasis on Islam as the religion of the *fiṭra.* This latter emphasis also seems to entail more interest in the issue of *shirk,* religious difference, and the idea that if left alone, humans naturally will find Islam the most appropriate religion or way of life. Finally, while all commentators stay within the broad strokes of the previous two periods, the contemporary works of Ibn ʿĀshūr, Ṭabāṭabāʾi, and Quṭb mark a departure from the interpretations and concerns of previous centuries. They draw on wider resources than was usual earlier and are particularly interested in readings of *fiṭra* that can be described as within the logic of theories of 'natural law.' Finally, Ibn ʿĀshūr and Ṭabāṭabāʾi seem more engaged with the thought of the *falāsifa,* whether it is Ibn ʿĀshūr's engagement with Ibn Sīnā or Ṭabāṭabāʾi's interest in the 'perfection' of human beings. Quṭb, the third modern, also affirms the 'all-human' relevance of *fiṭra,* both in its relation to the question of unbelief and potential connections to modern science and the prevalent biological terms for a shared human origin.

Before transitioning from the Qur'anic commentaries, I want to summarize the findings of my analysis across the three periods.

1. There is a remarkable consensus in the interpretation of the term '*fiṭra'* in both content and issues and debates perceived to be connected.
2. Despite this consensus, there is a variety of interpretations and concerns that betray certain interests and diverge on certain issues. These include whether '*fiṭra'* refers to a religion/way of life, Islam, or a mere disposition (and what for exactly), the reliability of that innate religion or disposition, the question of predestination, and the prohibition of change. However, there appears to be little interest in intellectual interpretations or the question of multiple *fiṭar.*
3. Over time there seems to be an increasing emphasis on religious boundaries as discernible from factors such as: a wider acceptance of the prohibitive reading when it comes to changing the *fiṭra,* a greater reliability of the *fiṭra* and thus also more individual responsibility for not following it, a heightened interest in *shirk,* and a closer connection between the *fiṭra* and Islam (rather than just *fiṭra* and monotheism).

4. Finally, the contemporary period seems to witness a certain reinterpretation of the term with commentators drawing on a greater variety of intellectual resources. While individual interests are a feature not new to the tradition, scholars such as Quṭb, Ibn ʿĀshūr, and Ṭabāṭabāʾi inflect their readings with concerns that are as surprisingly similar to each other as they are different from previous centuries.

Overall, the main emphases and interests of the Qur'anic commentaries are thus quite consistent across the three periods. While I have continuously emphasized the existence of a certain diversity in depth, interest, and individual convictions, as well as certain developments or trends over time, such divergences appear to oscillate around what can only be described as a fairly general consensus regarding the meaning of and relevant debates surrounding the term '*fiṭra'* in the Qur'an.

IV. *Fiṭra* in the *Ḥadīth* Collections

As we have seen, many commentators, if not the majority of those during the middle period, point in their comments on the term *fiṭra* in *Surat al-Rūm* to a prophetic saying transmitted in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections of both Bukhārī (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875).[178] The reason is plain beyond the occurrence of the term '*fiṭra'* in the *ḥadīth*: for it is transmitted, through the mouth of ʾAbū Hurayra, that after the Prophet uttered the *ḥadīth*, he quoted verse 30 of *Surat al-Rūm*. In what follows I will look at both the earliest and most celebrated commentaries written on each of the collections and show that the basic assumptions and arguments overlap with, and indeed reinforce, what I have found in my analysis of the Qur'anic commentaries.[179] However, I should add that it

[178] For example: al-Hawwarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Samarqandī, al-Thaʿlabī, ʾAb'l-Futūḥ Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Rāzī, al-Zamakhshari, Ibn Atiyya, Ṭabresi, al-Jawzī, al-Buṣrawī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Brūsawī, al-Al-Shawkānī.

[179] Adang notes that the question of the fate of children historically might have been occasioned by the Azraqiyya sect within Kharijism, which claimed that those who die before maturity are damned to hell as they have not claimed Islam. ("Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind," 394; quoting Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 44 and 214), the origins of this *ḥadīth* might thus lie in this early controversy (which exonerates the children and puts the onus on parents and those mature enough to choose their religion). Gobillot argues that the two main functions of this tradition were to assist arguments with polytheists as well as polemics with Qadarites and Muʿtazilis (cf. *La fiṭra,* 20 and 32).

is hard to make any educated guesses as to the understanding of the *ḥadīth* material in early centuries. The compilations themselves date from the 9th century C.E. and most commentaries thereupon are naturally even later (from the 11th and 12th centuries and thereafter).[180] While I, as in the case of the early *tafsīr,* strive to reconstruct a sense of the conceptions of *fiṭra* before the time of al-Fārābī, I want to be clear that the results of my efforts might be described as contemporary with him at best.[181]

Before focusing on the tradition reporting all humans to be born on the *fiṭra,* I should note that there are several other *ḥadīth* reports that invoke the term *fiṭra.*[182] One is recorded in Muslim's 'Book of Purification' (*Kitāb al-ṭahāra*), in the chapter on the 'Characteristics of the *fiṭra*' (*bāb khiṣali al-fiṭrati*), as well as the 'Book on dress' (*Kitāb al-libās*) in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī. The saying is also narrated by ʾAbū Hurayra and states that the things that come from the *fiṭra* are five, namely circumcision, shaving the pubes, cutting the nails, plucking the hair under the armpits, and shaving one's beard. In variants, this saying is also contained in the *Muwatta* of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795) and the *Sunan* of Abī Dāwūd (d. 889).[183] *Fiṭra* also appears in descriptions of the Prophet's night journey and ascension, which is again narrated by ʾAbū Hurayra and contained in Bukhārī's 'Book on Drinks' (*Kitāb al-ʾashriba*) and Muslim's 'Book of Faith' (*Kitāb al-ʿīmān*). Here Muḥammad is described as having been offered two cups, one filled with wine and the other with milk and choosing the latter Gabriel is said to describe him as being 'guided to the *fiṭra'* by God.

[180] Gobillot discusses several earlier attestations, most importantly a version of the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra contained in the *Muwaṭṭa* of Mālik (*Book of Burials*) and a discussion of 7:172 in *Al-Fiqh al-akbar* of ʾAbū Ḥanifā (cf. *La fiṭra,* pp. 14-16) that emphasizes unbelief as a change or divergence from the *fiṭra.* She also notes that before ʾAbū Hurayra's tradition became dominant, there were variants that focused on the children of polytheists, rather than people of the book; the latter however became dominant and eventually led to the identification of Islam with the *fiṭra* (cf. *La fiṭra,* 19-22).

[181] The *ṣaḥīḥ* collections, which were the first to claim to include only authentic materials, developed in the 9th and 10th century C.E. We might wonder whether that is reason why it was only Ibn Rushd who began to make reference to the scriptural uses of *fiṭra.*

[182] I cite all of these Ḥadīth reports from sunnah.com (accessed 7/8/2019).

[183] Both of these collections rank behind Bukhārī and Muslim in the list of the six most important *ḥadīth* collections.

Another *ḥadīth*, from Muslim's 'Book Pertaining to the Remembrance of Allāh, Supplication, Repentance and Seeking Forgiveness,' speaks of 'dying on the *fiṭra'* after discussing certain supplications before bed. Further, Muslim's 'Book of Prayers' describes a man uttering the 'Allāhu akbar' as "following the *fiṭra.*" Finally, Bukhārī, in his 'Book of Dream Interpretation' (chapter on the 'Interpretation of Dreams after the *fajr* prayer'), mentions Abraham in paradise, surrounded by children that 'died upon the *fiṭra.*' All these themes, whether the five 'natural' acts, the non-alcoholic, 'natural' drink, and an undeveloped, intuitive faith in God, express the idea of (a natural) human conduct in accordance with the divine will and creation of man as *hanīf*. And they do so with a remarkable interest in the body.[184] However, none of the Qur'anic commentators makes reference to either of these *ḥadīth* reports in their discussion of the *fiṭra* in *Surat al-Rūm.* Additionally, the Qur'anic commentators are not interested in bodily questions. Finally, these utterances have attracted a lot less scholarly interest. I will thus leave them for now.

In contrast, both the celebrated collections of Bukhārī and Muslim contain several variants of a famous prophetic saying (often known as *kull mawlūd*) that is overwhelmingly attributed to ʾAbū Hurayra and invokes *Surat* al-Rūm 30.[185] The basic idea is one we have already encountered during our engagement with the *mufassirūn:* some or all people are born on some incipit form of i/Islam and without blemish; later changes in religion are exactly that, changes to an original status

[184] I presume the interest in the bodily has to do with the part of the prophetic saying that speaks of perfection. As we have seen, many modern thinkers focus on the *ḥadīth's* interest in the body with regard to the concept of *fiṭra.* The bodily vs. the theological and the political is another realm of *fiṭra.* I am not able to explore it further at this point.

[185] A variant of this saying is also found in the 'Book of Burial' in Mālik's *Muwatta.* And, I should add that already the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 827) contains a variant of this saying (cf. *Muṣannaf* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2000), 151) narrated by ʾAbū Hurayra: "Every child is born upon the *fiṭra;* then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian; just as the animal brings forth [meaning: gives birth], do you perceive in it any blemish?" (my translation). Then follows the recitation of *Surat al-Rūm,* "the *fiṭra* of Allāh upon which he created people." For a discussion of the historical value of the collection see Harald Motzki, "The Muṣannaf of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī as a Source of Authentic *Aḥādīth* of the First Islamic Century," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50, vol. 1 (Jan. 1991): 1-21. As Gobillot points out, between ten versions in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad,* six in Muslim, 4 in Bukhari, two in Tirmiḍhī, two in Mālik, and one in ʾAbū Dāwūd, there is a total of 25 variants (cf. *La fiṭra,* 19).

intended by the creator. The central concern for both Bukhārī and Muslim seems to have been the religious status and fate of children.

In Bukhārī, the relevant sayings occur in the 'Book of Funerals' (*Kitāb al-janāʾiz*), in a chapter on whether to pray over dead children and whether to offer Islam to children.[186] The *ḥadīth* is introduced with the explicit order that every child born alive should receive the funeral prayer "because he was born on the *fiṭra* of Islam."[187] This applies particularly if their parents were Muslims, even if the mother was of a different religion. It is not said what explicitly happens if the father or both parents are not Muslims at this point; the only caveat is that the child must be born alive. Then the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra follows, which reads here: "The Prophet said 'Nobody is born except upon the *fiṭra,* then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Zoroastrian. Just as the animal brings forth a perfect animal; do you perceive any defect in it?' Then ʾAbū Hurayra said 'the *fiṭra* of Allāh upon which he created people.'"[188] Later in the book a variant is recorded, which reads: "Every child is born upon the *fiṭra,* then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Zoroastrian. Just like the animal brings forth the animal; do you see in it a defect?"[189] The general context in this collection is thus one of concern for proper burial and thus the broad religious belonging of children in particular.[190]

The idiosyncratic collection *Nawādir al-ʾuṣūl fī maʿrifat aḥadīth al-rasūl*[191] of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḍhī (d. 910) has a chapter (no. 64) on the meaning of the *fiṭra ʾaṣliyya*[192] which provides one of the earliest commentaries on the *ḥadīth*.[193] After quoting ʾAbū Hurayra, al-Tirmiḍhī

[186] References are to *The Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2014).
[187] *The Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī*, 330.
[188] Ibid. Importantly, the same *ḥadīth* is also recorded in the 'Book of (prophetic) Commentary' (*Kitaāb al-tafsīr*), no. 298/4775.
[189] *The Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī*, 337.
[190] An issue, as we have seen, that also attracted sustained interest among the Qur'anic commentators.
[191] References are to the following edition: Beirut: [?], 1992.
[192] Cf. *Nawādir al-ʾuṣūl fī maʿrifat aḥadīth al-rasūl*, pp. 308-314
[193] The version he quotes appears to be a mixture of both Bukhārī and Muslim as the editor notes.

immediately notes that being born on the *fiṭra* means being born on Islam.[194] He also instantly refers to 7:172, arguing that those who testified to God's lordship were born on that *fiṭra*; and when Jews, Christians, or Magians have children, they form them on their laws.[195] In addition to the frequently invoked episode of the covenant, al-Tirmiḍhī also quotes Qur'an 2:138 ("[our life] takes its colour (*ṣibgha*) from God"), which he interprets to refer to the *fiṭra* God created humans upon and which is better than those 'colors' the Jews and Christians raise their children on. Indeed, God asks them to purify or cleanse themselves from these.[196] He also quotes several scriptural sources on the issue of the death of children (whether Muslim or unbeliever) and the fact that God created humans as *ḥanīfs,* before they were led astray.[197] The main take-away of this early commentary is what we will see throughout: namely a general consensus that agrees with that of the *mufassirūn.* The *fiṭra* mentioned here is Islam and is to be connected both to the primordial covenant, as well as the question of the fate of children.

However, in line with the divergences and occasional varieties we have seen among the *mufassirūn,* I should add that, as Gobillot points out, Tirmiḍhī's conception of *fiṭra* is also more complex than these basic points. In his *Ghawr al-umūr*[198] *fiṭra* is interpreted slightly differently. Here it is the human light of knowledge or the tool by which to attain knowledge, composed of five elements: comprehension (*fahm*), conception (*dhihn*), thought (*dhakā*), memory (*ḥifẓ*), and

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[194] Cf. *Nawādir al-ʾuṣūl fī maʿrifat aḥadīth al-rasūl,* 308.
[195] Cf. ibid. He also notes that what matters is the religion of the father, not the mother (cf. ibid., 309) and further argues that the reference to the perfect animal is a reference to the unbelievers (*mushrikūn*) mutilating the ears of animals which emphasizes that when God made humans, he made them on the *fiṭra* (cf. ibid) but humans make them Jewish or Christian.
[196] Cf. *Nawādir al-ʾuṣūl fī maʿrifat aḥadīth al-rasūl*, 310.
[197] Cf. ibid., 310-314.
[198] Edited by Gobillot, *Annales Islamologiques* 28 (1994): 1-83. Gobillot also published a translation, entitled *Le livre de la profondeur des choses* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1996). The relevant sections of the translation in which *fiṭra* comes up are FT in Gobillot, 221-224 and AR also in Gobillot, 26-32; as well as FT in Gobillot, 228-229 and AR also in Gobillot, 322-34. In the first passage we read of the created light of knowledge (*nūr al-maʿrifa*) that God placed in Adam and his descendants (and which is comprised of five elements that aid human servitude to God). In the second passage we learn of the original pact between God and Adam (cf. 7:172; for more details on Tirmiḍhī's conception of this pact see Gobillot, *Le livre de la profondeur des choses,* 77-92).

knowledge (*ʿilm*).[199] According to Gobillot, Tirmiḍhī might have been inspired in this reading by Aristotle's five intellectual virtues in the *Nichomachean Ethics* but it is unclear how he would have known about them or the text.[200] This is an interesting and exceptional find that might give us a clue into al-Fārābī's particular reading or, at the very least, suggest they were under similar influences. In either case, it is worth mentioning as it offers another indication that the concept of *fiṭra* was far from being singularly read and, in particular, that it stimulated (on the margins) intellectual interpretations early on.[201] Overall, we are thus, on the one hand, cautioned against being too insistent on the existence of a consensus that appears overwhelming at times. On the other hand, even Tirmiḍhī connects the idea of *fiṭra* as the 'light of knowledge' to the original covenant and the question of God's oneness and lordship, albeit in a manner more focused on the intellectual properties of Adam. As Gobillot notes, Tirmiḍhī (and he might have been the first in Islamic history to have done so) reads fiṭra as the capacity to faithfully respond to God's call to acknowledge his lordship (as described in Qur'an 7:172), given to all humans without distinction.[202] While the overlap with conceptions of the mind (*ʿaql*) appear plain, the particular function of the human mind is to recognize God's lordship and assist human efforts to properly worship their lord.[203] The reading of *fiṭra* thus appears to occupy a sort of middle ground or bridge

[199] cf. *La fiṭra*, 54 (see also *Le livre de la profondeur des choses,* 135f).
[200] cf. ibid., 54f.
[201] Two other noteworthy early uses come from al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) and the Qāḍi ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025). The former, in his *al-ʿAql wa fahm al-Qurʾān* ([Beirut]: Dār al-Fikr, 1971), notes that the covenant God created (*faṭara*) the descendants of Adam upon is their intellect (*ʿaql*) and understanding (*fahm*) and through it "he obligated their intellects with a proof (*ḥujja*) by which they witness to his construction and the mastery of his creation in themselves and all of his creation" (*al-ʿAql wa fahm al-Qurʾān*, 264). While this proof he later confirms with the sending of the messenger, the idea is that God created humans to intellectually acknowledge his lordship. There seems to be another link then between the mind and the idea of *fiṭra* and covenant. The Qāḍi ʿAbd al-Jabbār in his *Tanzīh al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Naḥḍat al-Ḥadītha, [1966]) in his comments on 7:172 also connects the covenant with the minds of the descendants of Adam since we learn in this episode that Allah placed in their minds what would benefit them in this life and the hereafter (cf. *Tanzīh al-Qurʾān*, 153).
[202] *La fiṭra,* 53 and 56.
[203] On the insufficiency of this natural and inborn religion and the importance of love that separates believers from unbelievers see Gobillot, *Le livre de la profondeur des choses,* 62ff as well as 137-141 and 154f.

between what we will see among the *falāsifa* and the broad consensus that I have described so far in this chapter.[204]

Speaking about the consensus, ʾAbū Sulaymān Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 998) provides us with the first commentary (*sharḥ*) explicitly on the collection of Bukhārī. He was a Sunni Shāfiʿī scholar of traditional bent who might be described as critical of *kalām.*[205] In this commentary it is very plain that according to al-Khaṭṭābī, *fiṭra* is the '*dīn* of Islam' that only parents stir their children away from. After stating the prophetic utterance,[206] he first offers explanations regarding the root *f-ṭ-r,* which refers to the 'beginning of the khilqa' (*ibtidāʾu al-khilqati*).[207] Linguistically, the origin of the term is to make dents or holes (*ḥufar*);[208] however, scholars agree that the intended meaning here is "*al-dīn*"[209] which they conclude from the *āya* that follows (i.e. 30: 30). The second part of the *ḥadīth*, referring to the perfection of animals, supports this reading further: the notion of 'perfection' is one of soundness and while in the context of the animals, this refers to their bodily integrity,[210] for humans the implication is that they are born with a healthy *fiṭra* free of association (*shirk*) and deviation (*ʾilḥād*).[211]

In support of this understanding al-Khaṭṭābī then cites several *ḥadīth* reports, including the one involving ʿĀʾisha's concerns and two that speak about children inheriting belief and unbelief

[204] Given the potential for a connection between the *falāsifa* and the commentators, I might have to expand this section on Tirmiḍhī, if time and place permit. I am not sure, however, there is a lot more to be found.
[205] References in what follows are to *Aʿlām al-ḥadīth fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Mecca: al-Mamlakah al-ʿArabīyah al-Saʿūdīyah, 1988).
[206] His recording of the saying quotes a longer version of Qur'an 30:30, up to the phrase concerning the 'straight religion' (cf. to *Aʿlām al-ḥadīth fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 713).
[207] to *Aʿlām al-ḥadīth fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 713. He connects this reading to the broader conception of God as creator in places such as *Sura* 35: 1 ("Praise be to God, Creator of the heavens and earth").
[208] Cf. ibid., 714.
[209] Ibid.
[210] The context of the animal comparison is that of the pre-Islamic custom of animal mutilation and Islamic critiques thereof. This might be some interesting questions regarding animal welfare, environmental ethics, and *fiṭra* worth exploring here.
[211] Cf. to *Aʿlām al-ḥadīth fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* 714.

from their parents.[212] Such utterances, according to the author, fit the message of ʾAbū Hurayra; namely that "every human being is born first according to the beginning of creation (*mabdāʾ al-khulq*) and the original disposition (*jibilla*) is upon the healthy *fiṭra* and a *ṭabʿ* prepared for receiving the din."[213] He then adds that if such a person does not move away from the *fiṭra* or change it to something else, "then this *dīn* is clearly the good in his senses (*ʿuqūl*) and delights his soul;"[214] however, if he affects or influences it with some sort of vice then eventually children follow their parents and become Jews or Christians, with an "inclination towards their religions. And thus they withdraw from the healthy (*salīma*) *fiṭra* and the straight destination (*maḥajja mustaqīma*)."[215] The upshot of this utterance is thus "the praise (*thanāʾ*) of this *dīn* and its relation to the senses (*ʿuqūl*) and beauty, its position in the soul and [how it is] not [related] to adherence to the ruling (*hukm*) of the faith (*ʾīmān*) for the infant."[216] The natural preparedness (in terms of perfection and aesthetics) for the religion that is Islam, changed only by the parents, is clearly at the forefront of this commentary.[217] Additionally, the questions of change, a 'positive' belief in the natural turning to Islam, the connection to the notions of disposition (*khilqa*) and even nature

[212] cf. *Aʿlām al-ḥadīth fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* 715f.
[213] *Aʿlām al-ḥadīth fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* 716.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid. What the exact nature of that change means for the *fiṭra* is not clear.
[216] *Aʿlām al-ḥadīth fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* 716f.
[217] That the influence of parents is what matters comes out very clearly in a much-celebrated commentary by the Māliki Ibn Baṭṭāl (d. 1057) (references are to the following edition: *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyad: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2000)). After recounting multiple stories, including those of Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Sayyad, Ibn Baṭāl focuses on the question of what to do with children captured during war (cf. *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 341). While it is generally assumed that children follow the religion of their parents, esp. when they are accompanied by them, there is broad agreement that those children that die before maturity and without their parents are to be treated as Muslims (and thus prayed over and buried alongside other Muslims; cf. ibid., 342). What again matters thus is the original, born upon status that makes children be treated as Muslims, no matter what their parental orientation. As Gobillot notes, the idea of the mutilation of animals invokes demonic images through the term '*jadʿā,*' indicting the parents of the people of the book for changing their children's religion (cf. *La fiṭra,* 21f).

(*ṭabʿ*)[218] affirm the impression that the consensus regarding the content and issues related to the term '*fiṭra'* we have encountered among the *mufassirūn* lives on in *ḥadīth* commentary.[219]

In Muslim, the variants of the *ḥadīth* are contained in the 'Book of Destiny' (*Kitāb al-qadar*), in the section on 'the meaning of "everyone is born upon the *fiṭra*" and the ruling on the dead children of the unbeliever (*kuffār*) and the Muslims.'[220] The basic *ḥadīth*, narrated by ʾAbū Hurayra, here reads: "The Prophet said 'Nobody is born except upon the *fiṭra.* Then his parents make him a Jew and a Christian and Magian. Just as the animal brings forth a perfect animal. Do you see any defect in it?'"[221] Then the Prophet recited from *Surat al-Rūm* 30: "the *fiṭra* of Allāh upon which he created the people; there is no change in the creation of Allāh." Several variants follow that might not include the Qur'anic verse*,* might not describe the animal offspring as perfect or quote more from *Surat al-Rūm* 30 ('this is the straight religion (*dīn*)'). One variant narrated by ʾAbū Hurayra reads: "It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a polytheist. A person said: Allāh 's Messenger, what is your opinion if they were to die before that [before reaching the

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[218] Something we have seen a lot less among the *mufassirūn.*

[219] We can see this impression affirmed in the influential commentary on Bukhari by the medieval Shāfiʿī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449), who is generally perceived as the summation of the science of *ḥadīth*. His *Fatḥ al-bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* ([?]: Al-Maktaba al-salafiyya, 2015), in the book of funerals, has a section on the children of the disbelievers (*mushrikūn*) as part of which he quotes the *ḥadīth* narrated by ʾAbū Hurayra (cf. *Fatḥ al-bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* 248-51). While he notes the variety of people's conception of what might have been meant by the *fiṭra* here, he quickly points out that the most well-known and most common conception is that of "*al-islām.*" This is due to the fact that the *fiṭra* mentioned in *Sura* 30:30 is also commonly understood to be referring to Islam, which in turn connects to the other *ḥadīth* mentioned in this context already several times (namely that God created all humans as *ḥanīf,* before Satan led them astray from the *dīn* (in line with this reading, his explanation of the phrase 'all are born' makes clear that this refers to all the "sons of Adam" (ibid., 248), which means unbelief is acquired later while belief is natural to all on account of their *fiṭra*). Ibn Ḥajar, via quoting several authorities, also notes the connection to the color from God or *ṣibgha* (ibid.), as well as to the pact mention in 7:172 and thus the idea that God created humanity with a disposition (*jibilla*) ready to accept the true religion of Islam (ibid., 249). Additionally, the issue of double predestination and whether some or all are destined for belief in God (ibid.) receives some attention from the different scholarly opinions. Finally, he mentions a variety of opinions on the issue of parental responsibility and change (making it clear that through education children are changed away from the healthy *fiṭra*), without any seeming interest in the topic of prohibition when it comes to this change (cf. ibid., 250f).

[220] My translation. References are to *The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim* ([Cairo?]: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyah, 1955), pp. 2047-50.

[221] One variant (*The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim*, 2047, no. 25) explicitly substitutes the animal for 'Muslim,' meaning just as a Muslim brings forth a Muslim. For a summary of all seven variants recorded in Muslim see Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind," 393 n.11.

age of adolescence]? He said: It is Allah alone Who knows what they would be doing."[222] Another, noteworthy, version,[223] reported by ʾAbū Muʿāwiya (d. 680) substitutes *milla* for *fiṭra* and makes a reference to the age of maturity in which children can consciously choose their religion: it reads either, everyone is "born on the *milla* until his tongue expresses itself;" or "nobody is born except on this *fiṭra* as long as he does not express himself with his tongue."[224] The end of the section interestingly refers to three *ḥadīth* reports that express the idea that God created some people for heaven and others for hell, including children.[225] These variants emphasize the central issues connected to the question of the *fiṭra* for Muslim: the question of the religious identity of children and their destiny in the afterlife.

Two of the most influential and earliest commentaries on Muslim's collection were written by Mālikis in the Muslim West: the Tunisian Imam al-Māzari (d. 1141) and the Moroccan Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ b. Mūsā (d. 1149).[226] The latter's *Ikmal al-muʿallim bi fawāʾid Muslim*[227] transmitted and expanded the former's *al-Muʿalim bi-fawaʾid Muslim.*[228] Al-Māzari, after recording the variant sayings recorded in Muslim described above, notes several options for understanding *fiṭra* here, depending to some extent on the particular variant one is looking at.[229] For one, the shaykh [is that Imam Mālik?] says that some are of the opinion that this saying is to be related to the time when they were taken from their fathers' spines (clearly invoking Qur'an 7:172) and that the *fiṭra*

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[222] *The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim*, 2048, no. 23a; 2048, no. 24 and 2049, no. 26-28 in slight variation. Translation from Sunnah.com (access 7/8/2019, 12:42pm).
[223] *The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim*, 2048, no. 23b.
[224] Both my translation.
[225] *The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim*, 2050, no. 29-3. For example: "ʿAʾisha, the mother of the believers, said that Allah's Messenger was called to lead the funeral prayer of a child of the Ansar. I said: Allah's Messenger, there is happiness for this child who is a bird from the birds of Paradise for it committed no sin nor has he reached the age when one can commit sin. He said: Aʾisha, per adventure, it may be otherwise, because God created for Paradise those who are fit for it while they were yet in their father's loins and created for Hell those who are to go to Hell. He created them for Hell while they were yet in their father's loins" (translation from sunnah.com, access 7/8/2019, 1:07pm).
[226] Cf. Joel Blecher, "Ḥadīth Commentary," in *EI3.*
[227] References are to the edition *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim li l-qādī ʿIyāḍ* ([??], 1998).
[228] Tunis: Beit al-Ḥikma, 1987. The commentary occurs in the *'Book on Destiny,'* 3: 317, no. 1209.
[229] Cf. *al-Muʿalim bi-fawaʾid Muslim*, 317f.

referred to here is "that upon which their birth occurs until a change occurs at the hand of the parents."[230] Others believe that the *fiṭra* is people's lot, or what they have in terms of "happiness and misfortune."[231] Such a reading, he argues, is appropriate for those variants that note either a 'fixed' fitra or speak of 'this' *milla* as they connect to the idea that some children are destined to become unbelievers. However, Māzari immediately contends that one might understand children dying as unbelievers as being in a 'second state' and thus an acquired unbelief (*kufr*) (rather than having been born upon it). As a result of which such children are in a state "different from the *fiṭra* they were born upon."[232] This understanding gives a little more conceptual meat to the question of predestination as it also came up in the Qur'an commentaries, namely that indeed all humans are born on the *fiṭra* in a first stage, making unbelief something acquired at a later stage.[233]

A third option, which we have rarely encountered among the *mufassirūn*, is to understand the *fiṭra* as what is placed in a human being's senses. Not too far from Tirmiḍhī's conception, Māzari offers the possibility that the "*fiṭra* of Islam is the consciousness [or good sense] (*ṣawāb*) of them [i.e. the sense]; like the thing that structures a person's mind. And it drives the mind away from sin and change at the hands of the parents or being other than them."[234] In a penultimate section Māzari turns to the question of the fate of children: that of the believers (*muʾminūn*) children is clear, they go to heaven.[235] However, regarding the fate of the children of unbelievers (*kāfirūn*) the ulama disagree;[236] their fate could resemble that of their parents. Finally, Māzari argues regarding the bodily integrity of the animal mentioned in ʾAbū Hurayra's *ḥadīth* that

[230] *al-Muʿalim bi-fawaʾid Muslim,* 318.
[231] Ibid. An option among the *mufassirūn* as well as we saw above.
[232] Ibid.
[233] I am guessing in the sense of 'move away.' On such a reading unbelief is an acquired trait that masks the original creation.
[234] *al-Muʿalim bi-fawaʾid Muslim,* 318.
[235] Cf. ibid., 319.
[236] Cf. ibid.

humans, like animals, are born sound and without defect. Defects occur by action, just like sins are the result action (or inaction); in the case of humans through "the education given to them."[237] The overall argument reinforces what seems to be clear throughout: the *ḥadīth* emphasizes the perfection of all creation, including humans, at the outset; sins (whether they are applicable to children already or not) are the result of conscious, later actions. At the same time, the possibility of slightly different readings as well as the importance of the question of predestination, all aspects that mirror my analysis of *tafṣīr,* are present as well.

Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's commentary replicated al-Māzari in large parts. He emphasizes the incipit nature of *fiṭra* and the fact that distortion enters later. Thus, in his summary section he notes that the meaning of *fiṭra* is "that which the servant is created upon at the origin and beginning of his creation (*khilqatihi*), before his knowledge of anything at the hands of man,"[238] until his parents and those surrounding him introduce him to something else. He reiterates the thought that the *fiṭra* is the *khilqa* and beginning of man by connecting it to those variants that mention a later change through conscious expression (or by the tongue) or via the influence of parents,[239] as well as the broader fact that children follow their parents. By the *fiṭra* here is thus meant the *fiṭra* of our parents, which in turn means their religion (*dīn*). [240]

I ought to mention a third, slightly later commentary, written by the Shāfiʿī Imam al-Nawawī (d. 1277). His commentary is probably the most celebrated commentary on Muslim and heavily utilized and expanded the other two mentioned so far.[241] In his comments, al-

[237] *al-Muʿalim bi-fawaʾid Muslim,* 320.
[238] *Ikmal al-muʿallim bi fawāʾid Muslim,* 150.
[239] Cf. ibid., 151.
[240] Cf. ibid. However, he notes that such a reading might clash with the *fiṭra* mentioned in 30:30, which rather refers to one's lot in terms of happiness or misfortune. Finally, Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ brushes the issue of the fate of the children of the unbelievers (*mushrikūn*), invoking both the hadith referring to the freedom of divine judgment on the matter as well as the Prophet's response to Aisha (cf. ibid., 151f).
[241] References are to the following edition: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ muḥyī al-dīn al-Nawawī* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1994).

Nawawī immediately turns to the question of the fate of the children of Muslims and unbelievers (*mushrikūn*).[242] While the former are, by general agreement, in heaven, he notes multiple opinions regarding the latter's destiny (including hell with their parents and heaven) and ultimately argues that they are in heaven,[243] following several prophetic utterances to that regard. Regarding the meaning of *fiṭra* here, al-Nawawī notes several options: first, al-Māzari's opinion; then one by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan (d. 805)[244] (that this is the first Islam, before any further obligations had been revealed),[245] as well as ʾAbū ʿUbayd (d. 838)[246] (that those who die on the *fiṭra,* before they become Jews or Christians, die as Muslims) and the opinion by one Ibn Sibārik (?) that claims that God created a Muslim on the *fiṭra* of Islam and an unbeliever (*kāfir*) on that of unbelief; and the option that "everyone is born with a knowledge of God" and "there is no one who does not know that he has a creator."[247] However, the most correct opinion, according to al-Nawawī, is that "every child is born prepared (*mutahayyiʾan*) for Islam" but the parents then sway children,[248] which means that if one is born to Muslim parents one's fate in this world and the next is well sealed. He then raises the issue of reaching maturity: there is agreement that those who reach maturity under their unbelieving parents (*kāfirūn*) will follow their fate (i.e. adopting unbelief), but people disagree regarding those who die before maturity. Our author, however, agrees with his predecessors that these children will enter heaven.[249] Predestination, *fiṭra* as incipit Islam, the 'positive' belief in humanity's natural turn to Islam, and the issue of change are thus once again at the forefront of this reading.

[242] Cf. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ muḥyī al-dīn al-Nawawī,* 423.
[243] Cf. ibid., 424.
[244] A student of ʾAbū Ḥanīfa and Mālik ibn ʾAnas.
[245] An option we also encountered among the *mufassirūn.*
[246] This is ʾAbū ʿUbaid al-Qāsim ibn Salām al-Khurāsānī al-Harawī, a well-known lexicographer.
[247] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ muḥyī al-dīn al-Nawawī,* 424.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Cf. ibid. Concerning the clause on the bodily integrity of the animal, al-Nawawī merely reiterates what we know regarding the soundness of the creature at birth.

Overall, the theme of a consensus with a small but significant diversity seems doubly affirmed: both across the *ḥadīth* commentaries themselves and when compared to the Qur'anic commentaries surveyed above. The early connection between the concept of *fiṭra* and either some form of Islam or, less so, a disposition for it, are clear. In this context, the primordial covenant of Qur'an 7:172 is nearly as relevant as *Surat al-Rūm.* Attendant questions of the status and fate of children, as well as changing one's natural belief under parental guidance, appear particularly at the center of the *ḥadīth* engagement with the concept of *fiṭra*. However, we also saw that there are at least two early instances where commentators adopt a reading that conceives of *fiṭra* rather in an intellectual or mind-structuring way that at least reminds us of what we will see among the *falāsifa.*

V. Summary and Conclusion

A note of caution seems prudent: as we saw in the previous chapter, much secondary literature simply translates the term *fiṭra,* assuming and perpetuating that it has a single, stable meaning across discourses and time. In this chapter I have shown that despite a very clear consensus that seems to have existed from early times across the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* commentaries regarding both the conception and issues relevant to the notion of the '*fiṭra,'* this is a term far from easily translated or described. As we could see, the same is true for central concepts such as *dīn* or *I/islam,* which change in their particular meaning and emphasis across time. Mohammed Yasien expresses this when he says that the *fiṭra* mentioned in both *Surat al-Rūm* 30 and the *ḥadīth* report(s) is, because of the words of ʾAbū Hurayra, to be understood as referring to the same

reality.[250] However, despite its scriptural origins, *fiṭra* is "a concept which cannot be clearly and concisely defined or circumscribed;"[251] hence there is "no single, precise meaning for it and any attempt to elucidate it will necessarily involve some subjective interpretation even though such an analysis stems from authentic classical Islamic scholarship and is based on the Qur'an and the *hadith.*"[252] Given the multiple emphases and readings I have discussed in the pages above, I believe this is a convincing claim and an important one to keep in mind for the rest of the dissertation. As we will see, the *falāsifa* extend this impression of diversity, complexity, and contextuality as they, too, offer their own take on *fiṭra,*

However, highlighting the diversity, and complexity of the central debates about and surrounding the term '*fiṭra'* does not negate what I have sought to show throughout: namely that it is already quite early in Islamic history that we find a broad but consistent consensus of possible readings, interpretations, and issues of concern when it comes to the *fiṭra.* Central here were the connection between *fiṭra* and Islam or islam (monotheism), as well as a disposition for Islam or monotheism which is often understood to be mutually reinforced by both the *ḥadīth* from ʾAbū Hurayra and the primordial covenant described in 7:172. Related concerns early on included the fate of young children and the potential 'change' that parents who adhere to other religions might cause to their children. As time moved on, interest in the question of the reliability of the original Islam/religion/disposition increased, as well as in the issue of predestination and whether changing the original creation is against the divine will. While individual interests and particular emphases existed across the survey, the *mufassirūn* of the modern period introduced the strongest

[250] cf. *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 22. In an earlier article he notes that al-Qurṭubī aside, no Muslim thinker ever believed the *fiṭra* to be mutable (cf. "The Interpretations of *Fiṭrah,*" *Islamic Studies* 34, No. 2 (Summer 1995): 139).
[251] "The Interpretations of *Fiṭrah,*" 129.
[252] Ibid.

developments in relation to the previous two periods (though quite consistently compared to each other). Here interest appeared to primarily focus on issues of religious diversity, virtue, and what some might call 'natural law' readings of the particular human, shared potential for perfection that is fulfilled only by Islam. It is noteworthy that the thought of the *falāsifa* regarding the term '*fiṭra*' and some of the issues they saw as relevant appears most influential in those contemporary writers. Finally, the 'positive' idea that unless changed, humans naturally become Muslims, or at least find Islam most appropriate, also became more prominent over time. While I noted diversity and marginal, intellectual and mystical readings throughout, a remarkable consistency across time, locale, expertise, and religious couleur is undeniable.[253] This consistency presents one strand of engaging with the concept of *fiṭra.* In fact, it is the most well-known strand and strongly reflected in the scholarly literature as discussed in chapter 1. The *falāsifa* presents another as we will see.

Finally, it remains to highlight some important but quite unresolved themes that have come up in both the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* commentaries. These include the question of predestination or whether there are there different *fiṭar*. While it generally appears as if commentators are more comfortable with affirming the idea of all humans beginning their life in the same way, the issue of whether some are from the beginning destined to (even only at maturity) 'choose' unbelief is present but often unresolved. Similarly, commentators consistently speak of a certain 'change' that parents cause to their children in turning them away from the *fiṭra.* However, the actual nature of that change receives little attention. Particularly since, as we saw, many during the earlier periods

[253] As Griffel notes, this reading theologically raises multiple issues, some of which the different commentators address. First, if Islam is so natural, why is it historically so late? This potentially could be explained via the concepts of the first covenant and the *ḥanīf*. Second, what is the role of revelation if all or much is contained in nature, meaning does revelation just confirm/amend/supplement what is already known? The issue of revelation in particular, as Griffel points out, is not acceptable to later theologians such as al-Rāzī, Ghazālī or Ibn Taymiyya, which means that the relationship between *fiṭra* and revelation has to be more complex (cf. "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (fiṭra)," 4).

interpret the verse's 'no change' clause to simply mean that there is no (substantive?) change to God's creation. Finally, is there such a thing as a first, original *fiṭra,* and a second, added one? If so, what is the relation between the two? Related to this question is the larger, theological issue of supersessionism. What really is the status of Judaism and Christianity depending on an author's understanding of the term *fiṭra*? This seems particularly relevant to the modern and contemporary period, when issues of religious boundaries and truth move to the forefront (both in commentaries and seemingly in politics). All of these questions shall remain with us throughout the coming chapters and will, in some form or another, reappear in the last chapter and the conclusion.

So far, I have discussed the current state of scholarship on *fiṭra* and the relative prominence of the scriptural use and conception of *fiṭra* therein. Additionally, I engaged the commentators' conception of *fiṭra* to show first, the existence of a consensus when it comes to *fiṭra;* and which to some extent explains the position of the predominant secondary literature when it comes to *fiṭra.* However, I also showed in this chapter that there is a certain diversity of questions, concerns, and conceptions among the commentators on the issue of *fiṭra.* This diversity prepares us for what I will show in the next four chapters: that there is a second strand of conceiving of *fiṭra* in Islamic thought. In fact, the complexity of the commentary tradition reflects the complexity of Islamic thought more broadly. For throughout Islamic history, the concept of *fiṭra* has been used and conceived of in more than one way and far beyond the confines of questions concerning a natural human knowledge of God. I will show this by engaging with the use and conception of *fiṭra* among central *falāsifa* from al-Fārābī to Ibn Rushd. It is to the works of al-Fārābī—most likely the beginnings of the *falāsifa's* use and conception of *fiṭra*—that I turn to now.

Chapter 3:
Platonic Politics and Aristotelian Logic:
Fiṭra as the Seat of Human Dispositions and Source of the First Intelligibles and its Implications for the Division of the City in al-Fārābī (d. 950)

I. Introduction

While Aristotle is known in Islam as "the first teacher" of philosophical wisdom, his distinguished commentator ʾAbū Naṣr al-Fārābī is known as "the second teacher" (*al-muʿallim al-thāni*). Like his predecessor in name, al-Fārābī is also held in high esteem for his commentaries on Plato and for his own work in logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy, and the philosophy of art. In this chapter, I will explicate his uses of the concept of *fitra* and demonstrate its centrality in his influential contributions to moral and political philosophy. In particular, I will show that the *fiṭra,* or inborn dispositions, connects different aspects of al-Fārābī's thought that explore the general question of what sets certain human beings apart from others and helped al-Fārābī convey fundamental insights from his engagement with Greek philosophy for an Arabic speaking and potentially Islamic audience.[1] At the broadest level, attention to *fiṭra* thus shows that Islamic philosophy uses Islamic concepts in its engagement with Greek philosophical thought. However, while al-Fārābī uses the term '*fiṭra*' throughout his corpus, his exact understanding of the term and his reason for using it are not entirely clear. What I argue in this chapter is that at the broadest level, his use of *fiṭra* is part of a conversation about what the human being is and can do in the world. More specifically, al-Fārābī is concerned with what human beings have in common and

[1] On the question of whether al-Farābī should be viewed as someone who went back to Plato and Aristotle, rather than mainly drawing on neo-platonic thought, see Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2f; and Hans Daiber, "Prophetie und Ethik bei Fārābī (gest. 339/950)" (in *L'Homme et son univers au Moyen Âge*, ed. Christian Wenin (Louvain-la-Neuve: editions de l'Institut Superieur de Philosophie, 1986), 2: 729-53). More recently, Dominic O'Meara (*Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)) and Miriam Galston ("A Re-examination of al-Fārābī's Neoplatonism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15 (1977): 1-33) have stressed al-Fārābī's Islamic Neoplatonism, particularly in terms of his emanationist metaphysics.

what differentiates them. He pursues these questions while engaging Greek philosophy in Arabic and for an Islamic audience. His efforts of 'translation' and synthesis make extensive use of *fiṭra,* a concept derived from Islamic sources but notably absent from the Arabic writings of his Christian teachers and students. But what does the concept denote for al-Fārābī and what does it imply? What purposes does the concept serve in his thinking?

At its most general, *fiṭra* appears to have a triple character for al-Fārābī: it describes the dispositions natural to all creation, to all humans, and then to some elect. We may summarize *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī in the following way:

1. Every human being has a *fiṭra* (which is not the same as general human nature) but the human *fiṭar* are unequal.
2. As a result, some humans beings have great command of logic and are able to act on it (as political leaders and in their moral development as well as ethical decision-making).
3. Given this inequality of *fiṭar,* human beings need other human beings. As a result, our happiness is best achieved under social organization. One purpose of this organization is to help those who cannot conceptualize and realize their happiness on their own (because of their limited *fiṭra*) do so through education. This education is devised and administered by those of excellent *fiṭra* via constraints given by religion and law. Moreover, since people cannot become virtuous (and therefore not happy) simply in virtue of having good *fiṭra* (or excellent dispositions), there is still a social need to help people develop their *fiṭra* so that they can become happy. When a person's *fiṭra* is better developed, they are better equipped to grasp ethical and logical truths and develop the virtues necessary for ultimate happiness. Put differently, the ability to make ethical judgments or to be virtuous is the outcome of a well-ordered *fiṭra* (for those who can achieve it); and as such the fruit of (broadly conceived) political labors. However, while thus affirming the importance of intellectual, moral, and political formation of the individual, al-Fārābī also concedes that some people are indeed more disposed towards logic, a moral character, and political leadership than others. In logic, ethics, and politics, natural disposition and practical training are both part of the flourishing of the virtuous human being.
4. The just society will, thus, be the one in which persons are assigned roles based on their capacities to contribute to the vision of universal happiness previously articulated. Those with the best *fiṭra* have the most insight and will have the most power.

Fiṭra on this reading does describe the idea of innate dispositions that all humans share. These dispositions are relevant for the context of logic, politics, and ethics. [2] However, al-Fārābī mainly focusses on what differentiates different groups of humans, explaining why some are philosophers, rulers, virtuous and others are not.[3] As Damien Janos has put it, while it is true that al-Fārābī sought "to establish a philosophical system and curriculum that would be based on demonstration (*burhān*) and certain knowledge (*ʿilm yaqīnī*) and that could therefore have universal appeal and transcend religious and ideological particularisms," this does not change that "al-Fārābī intended his philosophy to be structured hierarchically on the basis of various epistemic criteria and hence to target different groups within society depending on their level of education."[4] In this scheme, *fiṭra* affirms a very basic shared humanity while also emphasizing how beyond these basics, certain groups of people are set apart from others. As we will see in chapters to come, Ibn Rushd would further develop al-Fārābī's double use of *fiṭra* as someting that both affirms a shared humanity and helps clarify what separates humans (particularly since, as we will see in this chapter, al-Fārābī focuses much more on the differentiating that the shared aspects). Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl, on the other hand, mainly used the idea of the *fiṭra* to differentiate the elites from the masses. While neither Ibn Bājja nor Ibn Ṭufayl would probably deny that all humans have a general *fiṭra,* their focus is on the respective excellence and deficiency of the different *fiṭar* of people. In agreement with such a focus on difference, gives much thought to the *fiṭri* needs of all humans, as Ibn Rush and al-Fārābī do when it comes to the human need for society. While both Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl still acknowledge the general human need for other humans, their focus on difference

[2] There is some disagreement recently regarding the fully 'political' nature of al-Fārābī's thought, arguing to conceive of it rather as a form of ethics not interested in the governance of humans; see, for example, Ulrich Rudolph, *Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2012), 1: 444ff.
[3] While I am aware of the implications of such a conception of humanity for questions of a 'politics of difference,' and particularly questions of slavery, gender, and empire, I am not going to focus on such questions here.
[4] "Al-Fārābī," in *EI THREE*.

appears to be part of their broader arguments for the possibility of a life outside of society for some.[5]

Despite these general trends laid out just now, there are several issues that al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* leaves open, as well as several tensions that I am not sure I can resolve.[6] These include:

a) What really does the shared humanness describe; or, put differently, what really is the basic *fiṭra*?
b) Relatedly, how are we to differentiate *fiṭra* from *ṭabʿ* (character) and/or *ṭabīʿā* (nature)? It appears as if both roots (*f-ṭ-r* and *ṭ-b-ʿ*) describe an innately given status. At the same time, *fiṭra* appears more frequently in the context of differentiation by natural givenness (i.e. it is by nature (*ṭabʿ*/*ṭabīʿā*)[7] that humans have certain characteristics but there are also, by (*fiṭra*), real differences of dispositions which are relevant for logic, politics, and ethics).
c) In the context of logic, al-Fārābī is not always clear whether the first intelligibles are known through the *fiṭra*, contained in it, or indeed are the *fiṭra.* Similarly, it is not always clear what kind of knowledge is indeed *fiṭri.* Particularly in the context of ethics it appears at times as if very basic insights (such as goodness is a good we desire) or the ability to make ethical judgments (i.e. recognize something as expressive of the good we desire) are innate per se (i.e. inborn); yet at other times they appear to be the result of a well-formed *fiṭra.*
d) How much is a good *fiṭra* the outcome of an originally good set of dispositions and how much can habituation and general guidance do for people? While formation is necessary and beneficial for all, it does not seem that all humans share the same ceiling.

[5] Though, as we will see, they each have slightly different conceptions of the possibility rather than necessity of such a separation.
[6] And as we will see over the course of this dissertation, some of these issues are recurring concerns.
[7] The use of *ṭabīʿa* to reflect a simple sense of nature or *physis* is, for example, plain in the common Arabic translation of metaphysics as *mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa*. For such a use in al-Fārābī in particular see his *Philosophy of Aristotle* (*Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1961)). Here he extensively discusses Aristotelian natural science by way of the term *ṭabīʿa*. On the history of *physis* and its relation to *nomos* see Richard D. McKirahan Jr., *Philosophy before Socrates* (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 390ff; also, A.A. Long, "Law and Nature in Greek Thought" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Law,* eds. Michael Gagarin and David Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 412-30; and C.C.W Taylor. "*Nomos* and *Physis* in Democritus and Plato" (in *Freedom, Reason, and the Polis: Essays in Ancient Greek Political Philosophy,* eds. David Keyt and Fred D. Miller Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-20. The seeming overlap between the two roots is something I refer to throughout the chapter (and in fact the dissertation), but I am not sure what to make of it at this point. Sometimes it seems there is a rhyme and reason to it, sometimes al-Fārābī uses one or the other when I expected him to do the opposite. However, I do not think it weakens my broader argument, either regarding his understanding of *fiṭra* just described, or the use of *fiṭra* as a familiar concept to aid understanding and clarify the multiple uses of 'nature' in his sources.

Finally, beyond the content of al-Fārābī's *fiṭra* a related but more historical insight will emerge from this chapter. Based on a cursory engagement with al-Fārābī's Arabic sources as well as the writings of his students, it appears that he was unique in his frequent use of the term *fiṭra*,[8] a term that I assume to have some religious significance given its occurrence in both the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature.[9] Against the background of the translation of Greek philosophy as an inter-religious activity at the time, this recognition leads me to claim that first, the Qur'anic concept served al-Fārābī as a major aid for communicating the intricacies of Greek thought to his audiences. Second, considering his convictions regarding the need to translate philosophy into different linguistic and conceptual registers, *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī could point us to the usability of a Qur'anic and thus Islamic term in what is sometimes perceived to be merely Arabic philosophy. Put differently, beyond the particularity of his conception of *fiṭra* for Islamic thought and the interconnectivity of his theories of virtue, logic, and politics, attention to *fiṭra* might also offer one answer to the question of what might be 'Islamic' about al-Fārābī's 'Greek' philosophy.

[8] It is interesting that Phillippe Vallat devotes roughly four pages to this question, despite the fact that in the conclusion the author emphasizes the crucial function of *fiṭra* for al-Fārābī's philosophy and the continuity of his entire thought (*Al-Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 367). Seeing Platonism, Stoicism, and Aristotelianism as the three great sources of al-Fārābī's thought, Vallat translates *fiṭra* as the 'original nature' (*nature originelle*) and argues that it functions as a synonym for the intellect for al-Fārābī, parallel to the Stoic concept of nature (by which he means that each class of humans is predisposed to certain kinds of knowledge (*prohairesis*)). Like Geneviève Gobillot, Vallat connects *fiṭra* to several important themes I will explore below: the idea of a natural tendency (cf. *Al-Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie,* 280) as well as its connection to the active intellect as the source of such tendencies (ibid., 281), the concept of a shared human norm (somewhat in tension with the concept's relevance for the hierarchical ordering of society (cf. ibid., 302f)), and medium for the reception of the first intelligibles/being the first intelligbiles (ibid., 282).
[9] Given my discussion of the origins of *fiṭra* in the previous chapter, I believe it is justified to refer to it as a Qur'anic concept.

II. al-Fārābī and *Fiṭra*

Reconstructing al-Fārābī's life is challenging given that we lack both an autobiography and contemporary reports.[10] What seems quite certain is that his life was unspectacular. Al-Fārābī's family appears to have come from Transoxania, or the lands beyond the Oxus river (roughly the area of Central Asia that today includes Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and south-west Kazakhstan) and he himself grew up in Baghdad. Never a professional of any sort, unlike many of his philosopher colleagues who also served as doctors or the like, he moved around a fair bit, including cities such as Cairo, and Damascus.[11] However, as Ulrich Rudolph has noted, we do not really know much about al-Fārābī's life before he came to Baghdad and began to study the *Organon* (including the *Posterior Analytics*) with Nestorian Christian monks, most importantly, Yūḥannā Ibn Ḥaylān (d. 910).[12] Here he also learned Arabic and possibly studied philosophy with the Nestorian Christian translator and student of Aristotle, ʾAbū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d. 940).[13]

[10] For a recent summary of the biographical evidence see Janos, "al-Fārābī," as well as Dimitri Gutas, "Fārābī i. Biography" (in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Online Edition), New York, 1996-).

[11] Traditional accounts often note that while al-Fārābī himself never joined the court or secretarial class, his father might have been an officer (which is why he originally might have travelled to Baghdad).

[12] *Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt*, 370.

[13] Janos argues that it is in Baghdad that he became familiar with the "various other Greco-Arabic sources that underlie many of his theories. In addition to much of the Aristotelian corpus, he probably had access to (a) Ptolemy's *Almagest* and *Planetary hypotheses*; (b) Euclid's *Elements* and commentaries on parts of it, as well as material derived from various other Alexandrian mathematical and astronomical treatises (possibly by Geminus, fl. first century B.C.E., Poseidonius, d. c. 51 B.C.E., Pappus of Alexandria, d. 350 C.E., and Theon of Alexandria, d. 405 C.E.); (c) several of Galen's (d. 210 C.E.) medical works; (d) compendia of Platonic dialogues; (e) independent treatises, such as Alexander's influential *On the principles of the cosmos*; and (f), sections of Neoplatonic works from both the Alexandrian and Athenian schools, translated and adapted into Arabic, especially the *Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs* (The theology of Aristotle), essentially an adaptation of Plotinus's *Enneads*, books 4–6, and the *Kitāb fī maḥḍ al-khayr* ("Book of pure good"), an adaptation of Proclus's *Elements of theology*. Although al-Fārābī's philosophical approach may be connected primarily with the Alexandrian school of Ammonius, son of Hermeias (d. between 517 and 526 C.E.), he was probably familiar also with excerpts or doctrines from the works of Syrianus (d. c. 437 C.E.), Simplicius (d. c. 560 C.E.), and, especially, Proclus (d. 485 C.E.). The question of his knowledge of Theophrastus's works has never been explored, although he surely knew of the existence of this philosopher" ("al-Fārābī"). However, Rudolph notes that his studying with Mattā ibn Yūnus might have been a later invention, based on his exceptional logical abilities (*Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt,* 372). Similar questions can be raised about his knowledge of different languages, including Greek, and a supposed trip to Byzantium as well as his claimed association with Twelver Shi'ism (ibid., 372ff).

Al-Fārābī left Baghdad in 942/3 for Damascus and Aleppo,[14] which he again left after a while for Egypt (948/9). He eventually returned to Damascus and died there in 950/early 951. Not denying the importance of al-Kindī (d. 873) as the first Aristotelian philosopher writing in Arabic, al-Farābī is often seen as the first *major* philosopher to take up the challenge of integrating Greek philosophy with religious commitments more generally and Islam in particular.[15] While it is mostly assumed that Farābī did not know any Greek and primarily studied the *Organon* with his Christian teachers, the extent of (particularly) Platonic works available to him is unclear and perhaps underestimated.[16] No matter what his actual familiarity with Greek or translated texts of the tradition, the larger argument that my attention to *fiṭra* contributes to is the question of the character of what some term Islamic and others call Arabic philosophy. Basic to this contribution is what I perceive to be an important insight: that al-Fārābī made use of the term *fiṭra*—a concept of Qur'anic origin and generally conceived to describe a divinely created human nature—when clarifying and developing further what he found in Greek thought about the human being in its intellectual, political, and ethical capacities.

[14] Rudolph, *Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt*, 371. He also notes the often-attributed Turkish genealogy (which has been challenged by Vallat recently, in favor of a Persian one) and the fact that later sources describe al-Fārābī's supposed humility and separation from political life.

[15] Mahdi—though I should add that he is seen as too much under the influence of Straussian readings of al-Fārābī in contemporary scholarship—put it this way: "Having instituted a new epoch in human history and a new religious political order, the revealed religions challenged the tradition of Greek philosophy to investigate and make intelligible a religious-political order based on prophecy, revelation, and the divine law" (*Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 1).

[16] See Alexander Orwin, *Redefining the Muslim Community: Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in the Thought of Alfarabi* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 17: "The simple fact is that as long as we have not discovered any tenth-century Arabic translations of Plato, or proof of Alfarabi's knowledge of Greek, we will never be able to determine with any exactitude what texts of Plato Alfarabi actually read. Due caution is therefore required. And yet I find myself strongly inclined to the view that Alfarabi must have had access to something closely resembling the original texts of the *Republic,* and probably several other Platonic dialogues." Since al-Farābī claims familiarity with many Platonic dialogues in his summary of Plato, there is little reason to suspect he is lying. Additionally, no such knowledge is claimed in the case of Aristotle's *Politics.* For a more careful assessment of al-Fārābī's familiarity with Platonic texts (and the *Republic* and the *Laws* in particular) see Rudolph, *Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt,* 443. He notes that recently scholars (including Gutas and Galston) have put forward the thesis of al-Fārābī's stronger familiarity with Aristotelian political thought, highlighting the potentially complex influences upon his thought.

i) Every human being has a *fiṭra* but these *fiṭar* are not uniform

Al-Fārābī's *Book of Religion* (*Kitāb al-milla*)[17] makes clear that the human *fiṭra* is God's implanted human 'instinct,' comparable to the instincts given to other animals (which are not called *fiṭar*, however). Comparing God's management (*tadbīr*) of the world to that of the first ruler of the virtuous community (*al-ʾumma al-fāḍila*), al-Fārābī explicitly sets out the natural traits (*hayʾāt*) God places in the world to ensure its harmony and the *fiṭar* in parallel:

> There must be harmony, linkage, organization, and mutual support in actions among the arts of the virtuous nation, something similar to the harmony, linkage, organization, and mutual support in actions that exist in the parts of the world due to their natural dispositions (*al- hayʾāt al-ṭabīʿiyya*) […]. The manager [i.e. God] of the world places natural (*al-hayʾāt al-ṭabīʿiyya*) in the parts of the world by means of which they are made harmonious, organized, linked together, and mutually supportive in actions in such a way that, despite their multiplicity and the multiplicity of their actions, they become like a single thing performing a single action for a single purpose. In the same way the manager of the community must set down and prescribe voluntary habits (*al-malakāt al-ʾirādiyya*) for the souls in the divisions of the nation and the city that will bring them to that harmony, linkage of some to others, and mutual support in actions in such a way that, despite the multiplicity of their actions, the nation and the nations become like a single thing, performing a single action by which a single purpose is obtained.[18]

In short, the *fiṭra* is God's means of ensuring human functioning and flourishing in the world and thus an expression of the broader divine economy. Al-Fārābī then elaborates, speaking of the obligation of the ruler to prescribe virtuous traits for people. In this context he notes that "the manager of the world gave to the world and its parts, in addition to the *fiṭar* and the instincts (*gharāʾiz*) he implanted, other things that make the existence of the world and its divisions persevere and continue in the way he created (*faṭara*) it for very long period of time."[19] In a similar vein, the ruler should also not limit himself to prescribing measures that will lead to harmony (focusing only on habits [*malakāt*] and dispositions [*hayʾāt*]) but also look towards things that will

[17] In the following I translate from the edition published by Mahdi in *Alfarabi's Book of Religion* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1968). I sometimes refer to and modify an English translation by Butterworth found in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings: Selected Aphorisms and other Texts* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2001).
[18] ET in Butterworth (2001), 112 (modified); AR in Mahdi (1968 I), 65.
[19] Ibid. This passage makes it sound like *fiṭra* is indeed not limited to the human being as discussed in al-Fārābī's most clearly set forth engagement with the term in the *Book of Letters* (where, as we will see below, *fiṭra* is the particular quiddity of human beings). However, this appears to be a unique instance.

aid the preservation of such goodness. Thus, al-Fārābī closes the section with the statement that what the ruler ought to do is to emulate God and develop what is naturally placed in humans, namely "the instincts (*gharāʾiz*) and the *fiṭar* and the natural dispositions (*al- hayʾāt al-ṭabīʿiyya*) he set down and implanted in them so that the naturally good things are perfect in each according to its level (*rutba*)."[20] In this way the ruler should allow each city to develop to the best according to its level (*rutba*). While we will get to the question of proper rulership below, the basic idea here is that humanity, like all created species, received a *fiṭra* in order to allow for its flourishing. While the purpose of this section is to draw a parallel between the divine management and the task of the human ruler, the diversity of *fiṭar* (and its importance for politics) is already hinted at by the continuous appeal to different levels.

Al-Fārābī more clearly states that there is both a general human *fiṭra* (that separates the human being from other creations) and that these human *fiṭar* are not uniform across people in his *Book of Letters* (*Kitāb al-ḥurūf*).[21] The work is another of al-Fārābī's rather broad commentaries, engaging with Aristotle's *Metaphysics* but expanding it to include languages such as Syriac, Persian, and Arabic, as well as his own theories regarding the genealogy of languages, religions, and philosophy. Here *fiṭra* is the particular substance or quiddity (*jawhar*) of the human being. [22] By substance or *jawhar,* as al-Fārābī immediately clarifies, people generally mean a person's

[20] ET in Butterworth (2001), 113 (modified); AR in Mahdi (1968 I), 65f.
[21] In the following I translate from the edition published by Mahdi in *Alfarabi's Book of Letters (Kitāb al-ḥurūf*) (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1969). Muhammad Khalidi has published a partial translation in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). I indicate when I rely on or modify that translation.
[22] AR in Mahdi (1969), 98f. Gobillot, in reference to this section of the *Book of Letters,* has argued that "for al-Fārābī, the *fiṭra* of the human being is precisely his form" (*La fiṭra: la conception originelle, ses interpretations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans* (Damascus: Institut Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, 2000), 120 (my translation from the French)). However, later in the book she summarizes that al-Fārābī did in fact not have a unified theory of *fiṭra,* despite the fact that he used it in a 'unique' way (ibid., 128) (this is after mentioning what I will describe below: a tension between describing what is shared and what is individual in humans (ibid., 123), noting the term's social and ethical importance (ibid., 125), as well as its political relevance for ordering and governing the city (ibid., 126). I, however, believe, by contrast, that we can say some more unified things about the use of the term, without denying the presence of several tensions in the use of *fiṭra.*

ancestry. In the context of the human being this leads us to recognize "that he is created (*yufṭar*) in his human (*ʾinsāniyya*) *fiṭra,* upon the *fiṭar* of his forefathers and the soul-related (*nafsāniyya*) *jins* that they had."[23] What this inherited substance means is that "according to their soul-related (*nafsāniyya*) *fiṭra* his moral (*khulqiyya*) actions are either good (*jayyida*) or bad (*radiyya*)."[24] However, this inheritance is only a starting point for we learn that "after that, he is habituated according to what they believe in terms of customs and is molded according to what they believe in terms of moral characteristics (*akhlāq)* and he imitates them in all they do since he does not know anything else at the beginning of his life."[25] Such habituation is not an outgrowth of mindless ignorance; rather, the process of being formed by one's kin is mostly due to the fact that the human being "trusts them more than others. And also because he strives in his life for what they strive for."[26] This formation works both ways: for "when they [the forefathers] are deficient (*naqāʾiṣ*) by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) then his custom (*ʿāda*) is deficient like them. And when they are virtuous (*faḍāʾil*) by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) then his custom (*ʿāda*) is also virtuous like them (*faḍāʾil*)."[27] While

[23] AR in Mahdi (1969), 98.
[24] AR in Mahdi (1969), 98.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 99. As he further elaborates, what is mostly meant by a good *jawhar* is thus that "someone's *fiṭra* is good by which they perform their moral (*khulqiyya*) and artificial (*ṣināʿiyya*) acts and the majority of their intentional (*ʾirādiyya*) actions" (ibid., 99). Practically, this means that the human being is created (*yufṭar*) in such a way that "some of his intentional actions (*ʾirādiyya*) are easier for him than others so that he does by himself from the beginning the acts that are easiest for him" (ibid.). And if those original actions are "good (*jayyida*), it is said for him that his *fiṭra* and his *ṭabʿ* are good" (ibid). Returning to the beginning, al-Fārābī thus makes clear that whether the *fiṭra* that one is created upon is good or bad has to do with one's ancestors and their customs or the *fiṭra's* quality in itself. This emphasizes the aspect most crucial to what al-Fārābī makes of *fiṭra*, that is its variability. Al-Fārābī ends the section with a discussion of *fiṭra* as the *māhīya* of the human being (cf. ibid., section 65, 99). In this way he supports his previous point that "when the substances (*mawādd*) of things are good, the thing is good" (ibid., 100). Comparing it to the case of walls or beds, "if the wood is good, the bed is good since the excellence of the wood is the reason for the excellence of the bed" (ibid.). Similarly, if the stones, and clay, and the mason are good, "the wall built from them is also good for their excellence is the reason for the excellence of the wall" (ibid.). The same is true for humans: considering "the forefathers of the human being, and his mothers and grandparents and ancestors and his community and the people of his country, most of the people suppose that the substances of the human being stem from them or are in them" (ibid.). We may note that the comparison of human nature to the wood that is formed into something apparently was also a feature of Mattā ibn Yūnus's concept of an active or dispositional nature, geared towards the development of certain forms (see Janos, "'Active Nature' and Other Striking Features of ʾAbū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus's Cosmology as Reconstructed from his Commentary on Aristotle's Physics," in *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad*

we clearly see the role of *fiṭra* in moral formation as well as its insufficiency in this context (to be discussed in greater detail below), the double conception of the term as describing both more generally human and particular in its variability is plain.[28]

That there are different kind of *fiṭar* according to al-Fārābī means that certain actions are naturally easier than others for certain people. Humans, by their *fiṭra,* are "created (*yufṭar*) upon specific form (*ṣūra*) and trait (*khulq*) in their bodies;"[29] as a result, their souls are disposed towards certain "knowledge and conceptions and images,"[30] which makes certain ideas and actions easier for them. If we, thus, image "a human being left alone at the point at which he is created (*yufṭar*), such a person will be stirred and moved toward that which it is easiest to move towards by *fiṭra* and in the manner that is easiest for them."[31] The soul of such a person is moved by ease, for it

> undertakes to know, think, conceive, imagine, and intellect whatever is most strongly his disposition (*ʾisti ʿdād*) by *fiṭra*—for that is what is most easy for him. He moves his body and organs to whatever position and in whatever manner he is most intensely and perfectly disposed towards by *fiṭra* for this is too is most easy for him. The first time he acts in this way he acts through a power (*quwwa*) that is in him by *fiṭra* and a natural attribute (*malaka ṭabīʿiyya*), not by prior habituation (*iʿtiyād*) or art (*ṣinā ʿa*). And if he repeats an action of one kind many times, he will acquire a habitual attribute (*malaka iʿtiyādiyya*), either moral (*khulqiyya*) or artificial (*ṣinā ʿaiyya*).[32]

While there are natural dispositions and they are varied, there is a clear emphasis on the need to develop these inborn 'eases' further.

A good example of the role of ease by *fiṭra* is the varied acquisition of language across peoples. Still in his *Book of Letters* (*Kitāb al-ḥurūf*), al-Fārābī connects the notion of inborn ease

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and Beyond, ed. Damien Janos (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 135-177). However, there does not seem to be reference to *fiṭra* in ʾAbū Bishr Mattā's thought on this matter.

[28] These passages also indicate the interchangeable use of *fiṭra* and *ṭab ʿ*. However, in this work, at least, al-Fārābī does not seem to set *fiṭra* and *ṭabīʿa* as equivalent, which would be noteworthy since nature and substance in Aristotle at least are not the same. However, as we will see below, in many places al-Fārābī does use *fiṭra, ṭab ʿ* and *ṭabīʿa* as interchangeable (which, at least in the theological literature of Christianity was commonplace from the 5th century onwards, i.e. seeing *ousia* and *physis* as equivalent).

[29] AR in Mahdi (1969)*,* 134.

[30] Ibid.*,* 135.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

and difficulty (and thus the difference of *fiṭar* among peoples) to the physiology of producing sounds:

> The tongue moves first only to the part to which movement is easiest. Those who are in one place and have similar characteristic in their organs will have tongues that are created (*mafṭūra*) to move to the exact same parts inside the mouth and these types of movements will be easier for them than to other parts. The people of another place, who have organs with different characters and compositions, are created (*mafṭūr*) to have their tongues move to some parts inside the mouth more easily than to others, which are different from the parts to which the tongues of the people of the first place had moved.[33]

Different locales make for different people, with different bodies. As a result, different sounds, words and eventually different languages develop.[34] While the first words denote common concepts such as the sky or the earth, everything else develops in a sequence resembling the emergence of traits and crafts: thus these initial concepts "are followed by the things they inferred from these, then the actions resulting from the capacities that are theirs by *fiṭra*, then the attributes resulting from habituation (*malakāt*) to these actions, both moral (*ʾakhlāq*) and artificial, and the actions resulting from them once they have become attributes by habituation."[35] However, there are not merely different *fiṭar* but also differently well-constituted ones. Thus, al-Fārābī actually introduces a qualitative distinction:

> If the *fiṭar* of the people of that nation are balanced and the nation is inclined towards intelligence (*dhakāʾ*) and knowledge, they demand by their *fiṭar* from those expressions—without intending to—that they imitate the meanings they are made to indicate. They make them so that they most closely resemble meanings and what exists. Their souls will rise with their *fiṭar* because they (the souls) pursue to order these expressions according to the order of the meanings, as far as this is possible with expressions.[36]

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[33] ET in Khalidi, 5f; AR in Mahdi (1969), 137.

[34] As Griffel has put it, "*fiṭra* plays an important role in why humans were able to agree on a common language. When the first language was formed, the members of the human ur-community reached a spontaneous and immediate agreement on the words and their meanings. This agreement was, according to al-Fārābī, due to the common *fiṭra* of the humans. For al-Fārābī the notion of the human original disposition (*fiṭra*) is closely connected to the intelligibles (*maʿānī*). The original disposition makes humans order words in accord with the established order of the intelligibles. This coherence between words and underlying intelligibles led to the spontaneous accord of those who created language" ("Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fiṭra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102, no. 1 (2011): 10).

[35] ET in Khalidi, 7; AR in Mahdi (1969), 138.

[36] ET in Khalidi, 7f; AR in Mahdi (1969), 138f. Al-Fārābī reiterates shortly afterwards that this desire for order is due to "the *fiṭra* of the human being" which seeks "order (*tartīb*) and organization (*niẓām*) in everything" (AR in Mahdi (1969), 142).

If *fiṭar* of people of a certain group are in good shape, they are—during language development—able to denote things in a way that is most accurate. The importance as well as the divergence of *fiṭra* in the context of certain intellectual processes appears plain.

Taking the insights of this section together, we thus can see that there is a) a general *fiṭra* that marks humans as a particular creation of God; b) more than one *fiṭra* across different peoples that result in their different characteristics; and c) better (and seemingly, worse) *fiṭar* that result in more accurate languages, for example. It is this qualitative distinction, pointing to a greater ability to identify things as they really are, that I turn to next.

ii) The rational vs. the non-rational animals

While the al-Fārābī of political philosophy has often been foregrounded in scholarship,[37] his honorific title, 'second teacher,' is in reference to his work on Aristotelian logic. That al-Fārābī would be the 'second teacher' had much to do with very mundane realities: unlike previous philosophy in Arabic, including the towering al-Kindī (d. 873), he had access to an Arabic version of the *Posterior Analytics*.[38] There are, in fact, Arabic translations of multiple parts of the *Organon*

[37] We may note that Arabic political thought was primarily shaped by the *Republic* and Plato's *Laws* for, unlike for Christians, Aristotle's *Politics* was most likely not translated in the classical period. On this point see, for example, Majid Fakhry, *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam* (Brookfield: Variorum, 1994), 90; he discusses some of the implications of this reality, including the fact that Ibn Rushd wrote a commentary on the *Republic* instead of the *Politics*. See also Franz Rosenthal, *Greek Philosophy in the Arab World* (Brookfield, Variorum, 1990), 359 and 409; he discusses the likelihood of al-Fārābī's familiarity with the *Republic* and *Laws,* at least via the transmission of individual sayings. In his estimation, al-Fārābī most likely gathered "Greek Platonic thoughts from secondary sources which may have already been works composed by Oriental writers or rather translated works of the late Greek period" (*Greek Philosophy in the Arab World*, 411).

[38] Peter Adamson speaks of al-Fārābī's ability to engage the *Organon* as his 'triumph' (*al-Kindī* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15)). However, al-Fārābī's actual commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* is lost (just as his commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics* or the *De Anima*). What we have access to, despite references scattered throughout his works, are his *Kitāb al-burḥān* (*Book of Demonstration*) and the shorter *Ṣarāiṭ al-yaqīn* (*Conditions of Certainty*). More generally, one should note that while we only have about half of what al-Fārābī wrote, this is still considerably more than what has been preserved for somebody like al-Kindī, for example.

extant today. As I will attempt to show in this section, not merely in his work on the *Posterior Analytics,* but also in his work on the *Categories* and many smaller treatises did al-Fārābī make use of *fiṭra* as the source of the foundations of logic or the first intelligibles; this way *fiṭra* anchors the idea that what sets humans apart from other animals is their capacity for rationality.[39] Put differently, it is by the *fiṭra* that humans are rational animals. I am tempted here to believe that by making use of the Qur'anic notion of a divinely created *fiṭra* when considering the source of the first intelligibles and thus the basis of the logical science, Farābī gestured towards one possible ground for unshakeable foundations of logic.[40] However, as we might suspect from the above section already, the ability to partake in different kinds of rational discourses and thus make use of that foundation is not equally spread across people in al-Fārābī's account. As one might expect, this divinely anchored diversity has important political consequences.

The basic idea that *fiṭra* is the source of the first intelligibles and thus the foundation of the most excellent form of human reasoning is clearest in al-Fārābī's own *Book of Demonstration* (*Kitāb al-burhān*).[41] However, here (as throughout his works), the roots *f-ṭ-r* and *ṭ-b-ʿ* are closely related.[42] Thus the opening sentence of the second section of the book reads: "the universal

[39] Which, as we will see, includes such things as 'the whole is bigger than its parts' or basic insights about the even- or unevenness of certain numbers.

[40] Answering what Christopher Colmo has phrased thus: how "can we be certain of something and know that its opposite cannot be, when we are ignorant of the source of our certainty?" (*Breaking with Athens: Alfarabi as Founder* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005), 48).
On al-Fārābī's general conception of the human intellect, Janos writes that "the human soul is crowned by a rational faculty, which, unlike imagination, is completely immaterial. The human rational soul or intellect (*ʿaql*) is divided into three main faculties, powers, or stages—the potential or material (*al-ʿaql bi-l-quwwa or al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī*), the actual (*al-ʿaql bi-l-fiʿl*), and the acquired *(al-ʿaql al-mustafād*)—all of which correspond to stages in the process of learning and reflection. The first stage in the process of learning is when the material or potential intellect acquires the primary intelligibles, such as the axiom that the whole is greater than the part. Scientific knowledge proper develops once the first intelligibles have been assimilated by the potential intellect and are employed to compose syllogistic combinations. Repeated acts of cognition and conjunction with the Agent Intellect lead the human rational soul to its final and consummate stage, the acquired intellect" ("al-Fārābī").

[41] In the following I translate from the edition published by Fakhry in *Kitāb al-burhān wa kitāb ṣarāʾiṭ al-yaqīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987), which publishes the *Book of Demonstration* alongside his *Conditions of Certainty.*

[42] Though we ought not to expect too much detail since al-Fārābī explicitly states that, while the first intelligibles occur to humans without knowledge of how, the question of their origin is not part of the study of logic. In this context

premises (*al-muqaddamāt al-kulliyya*) by which necessary certainty (*al-yaqīn al-ḍurūrī*) is obtained is not [the result] of a syllogism (*qiyās*) but [stems from] two kinds: one of them is the result of temperaments (*bi-l-ṭibāʿ*) and the second is the result of experience (*bi-l-tajriba*)."[43] He then goes on to explain their source briefly, making use of the root *f-ṭ-r* in its verbal form:

> The type that occurs by nature (*bi-l-ṭibāʿ*) gives us certainty without us knowing from where or how it occurred and without us being aware at any time that we were ignorant of it or that we had the desire to know it or that we considered it an object of investigation at any point. Instead, we find that we have it in us, as if they were created upon it from the beginning of our existence, that it was innate to us (*gharīzī*) and we have not been without it. Such premises are called 'first [premises] naturally belonging to man' (*al-muqaddamāt al-ʾawwal al-ṭabīʿiyya li-l-insān*) and they are also called 'first principles' (*al-mabādiʾ al-ʾawwal*). And there is for us no need in this book to know how or whence they come about because our ignorance of the way in which they come about does not eliminate the certainty and does not diminish it and it does not hinder us from using them in a syllogism (*qiyās*) that gives us the necessary certainty that attends them. The way in which this first knowledge (*al-maʿārif al-ʾawwal*) comes about is one of the objects of investigation in science (*al-ʿulūm*) and philosophy (*al-falsafa*)[and not logic].[44]

We see here the overlap between the first premises and the first principles, which are both the building blocks of certain human knowledge, occurring naturally to man. The passage further highlights the limits of al-Fārābī's inquiry, relegating a deeper discussion of the origin of these principles to a different inquiry. What is clear, however, is that these naturally occurring principles are the premises out of which demonstrative knowledge (*burhān*) is constructed.[45] Coupled with the natural variety we already saw above, we see first hints of the different suitabilities of people for such demonstration.[46] Finally, what is most significant about al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* in his *Book*

Colmo notes that Farābī generally never offers much detail as to the content of the intelligibles. He only cites a few, overwhelmingly mathematical examples (*Breaking with Athens*, 47).

[43] AR in Fakhry (1987), 23.

[44] Ibid.

[45] As Colmo puts it, "demonstration is a syllogism in which the premises are universal and necessary, and the conclusion is both true and known to be true" (*Breaking with Athens*, 40).

[46] While I do not have the space for a full discussion of the book, it is noteworthy that cognates of the root *ṭ-b-ʿ* occur much more frequently in it than *fiṭra* (for example, AR in Fakhry (1987), 48, 51, 61-64, 66, 68-70, 73-75, 91 and 94). In fact, there seems to be only a single use of *fiṭra* (AR in Fakhry (1987), 88); the two seem interchangeable here as the same two options, knowing something over time or innately (*bi-l-fiṭra*), had been expressed previously by referring to *ṭabʿ* instead of *fiṭra* (AR in Fakhry (1987), 39). In the *Conditions of Certainty* (*ṣarāʾiṭ al-yaqīn*) he also uses *ṭabʿ* rather than *fiṭra* to describe what he takes to be the essence of Aristotle's teachings on the first premises and principles

of Demonstration is the fact that the author seems to have consciously added the term. I could not find any use of the root in the translation of the *Posterior Analytics* by ʾAbū Bishr ibn Yūnis (from the Syriac of Ishaq ibn Ḥunayn), which most likely was the Arabic version that al-Fārābī used.[47]

That al-Fārābī used *fiṭra* in his explication of the idea of the first intelligibles is clear throughout the many venues in which he commented on the *Posterior Analytics* beyond his *Book of Demonstration.* Thus, for example, at the beginning of his *Risāla fī'l-ʿaql (Epistle on the Intellect*)[48] he writes:

> And as for the intellect, which Aristotle mentions in the book of demonstration (*Kitab al-burhan*), by it he means that faculty (*qūwa*) of the soul by which man achieves certainty (*al-yaqīn*) with respect to the universal (*kulliyya*), true (*ṣādiqa*), necessary (*ḍurūriyya*) premises (*muqaddamāt*) [man does not arrive at these premises] by considering syllogism (*qiyās*) nor discursive thought (*fikr*) but rather by the *fiṭra* and nature (*ṭabʿ*) or from his childhood or from somewhere that does not alert regarding him that it has been attained or how it has been attained. So, this faculty (*qūwa*) is a part of the soul that attains first knowledge (*al-maʿrifa al-ʾawwali*), not by discursive thought (*fikr*) and never contemplation (*taʾammul*) and certainty (*al-yaqīn*) of the premises (*muqaddamāt*) whose characteristics we have mentioned and these premises (*muqaddamāt*) are the principles (*mabādi*) of theoretical knowledge (*al-ʿulūm al-naẓriyya*).[49]

Al-Fārābī here explicitly posits *fiṭra* as the source of the premises necessary to demonstration. However, we should add that he leaves it open that these premises could also come from experience (i.e. one's childhood) or other ways of acquisition we just forgot. The passage thus highlights that for al-Fārābī's *fiṭra* is most likely the source of the intelligibles. Yet since the source of these principles is an enigma to most, there are other possibilities mentioned. Additionally, we also see *fiṭra's* close relation to *ṭabīʿa* in this passage.

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and thus the sources of demonstrative knowledge in the *Posterior Analytics* (AR in Fakhry (1987), 101; the Arabic is nearly identical to the opening of the *Book of Demonstration,* as well as the *Letter on the Intellect*).

[47] Contained in *Manṭiq ʾAriṣṭū,* ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī's (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1980), 2: 329-485. Admittedly, I scanned the text, neither systematically translating it nor examining its manuscripts but I only saw references to *ṭabīʿa* (334, 426) and *ṭabʿ* (360).

[48] I am translating from the edition published by Maurice Bouyges in *Alfarabi Risāla fī'l-ʿaql* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938).

[49] AR in Bouyges, 8f.

Farabi's *Introductory Sections on Logic*[50] confirms the broad strokes of this image but offers a little more insight as to the content of these foundations of logic.[51] In the second section (*faṣl*) he states that one of the four things known without demonstration are the first intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwal*; the other three being accepted opinions (*maqbūlāt*), widespread things (*mashhūrāt*), and sense perceptions (*maḥsūsāt*)). When describing the first intelligibles al-Fārābī claims, invoking the language we have already seen nearly verbatim, that they are what "we find in ourselves as if they were created (*faṭarat*) upon being known from the beginning and formed upon certainty (*al-yaqīn*) through them and upon the knowledge that they may not and cannot ever be otherwise, without us being informed from the beginning how they came to us or from where they came."[52] Now he illustrates this a little further, stating that these include "for example, that every three is an uneven and every four an even number and that every part of something is smaller than that thing and that every total is greater than its parts and that every two things equal to a third are equal to each other and things like that."[53] Besides these, all other knowledge is the result of deduction.[54]

The section on logic in al-Fārābī's *Enumeration of the Sciences* (*ʾIḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*) echoes this sentiment.[55] Here he starts with a description of the goal of logic: logic helps a human being stay on the right path and avoid errors regarding the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*). Regarding them, al-

[50] The full title is *Fuṣul tashtamilu ʿala jamīʿi mā yaḍtarru ʾila maʿrifatihi man ʾarād al-shurūʿa fī sināʿat al-manṭiq, wa hiya khamsa fisūl* (lit. *Sections Containing Everything Someone Who Desires to Begin the Art of Logic Needs to Know, These Being Five Sections*).
[51] In the following I translate from the edition published by D. M. Dunlop in *Fusul tashtamilu* (*The Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955): 264-82). This pubication also contains a translation by Dunlop. I indicate when I follow or modify this translation and when I choose to translate a passage myself.
[52] ET in Dunlop (1955), 276 (modified); AR in Dunlop (1955), 267.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Farabi's *Utterances used in Logic* (*Kitāb al-ʾalfāẓ al-mustʿmala fī al-manṭiq*) explains a little more how these first principles are the basic building blocks of logic as they are the indestructible bricks upon which the logician erects a syllogism (cf. *Kitāb al-ʾalfāẓ*, ed. Mahdi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1968), section 57, p. 103f).
[55] In the following I translate from the Arabic edition published by ʿUthmān Amīn in *ʾIḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* ([Cairo:] Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1949). At points I modify the translation attached to the end of Angela Jaffray's Dissertation, "At the Threshold of Philosophy: A Study of al-Fārābī's Introductory Works on Logic" (Ph.d. diss., Harvard University, 2000).

Fārābī emphasizes what we have seen so far: "the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) include things about which it is not possible to err at all and they are what man finds in himself and it is as if they are created (*faṭarat*) upon their being known and through them there is certainty (*al-yaqīn*)."[56] The examples also sound familiar at this point: "the whole is bigger than its parts and that every three is an odd number."[57] Al-Fārābī then makes a comparison to language and grammar (as well as, at a later point, the rules of poetry or the function of a scale):

> the relationship of the art of logic to the intellect and intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) is like that of the art of grammar to the tongue and the utterances (*ʾalfāẓ*). So, all the rules that the sciences of grammar gives to us regarding the utterances, the science of logic gives us counterparts with respect to the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*).[58]

That nobody is beyond the rules of grammar or logic al-Fārābī underlines explicitly. The idea that someone might claim that such rules are not needed by all people (since they could be of perfect disposition (*qarīḥa*) and thus see themselves to be above the rules of either logic or grammar) is completely misguided according to our author.[59] The section on logic in the *Enumeration* thus underlines what we knew regarding the first intelligibles' function and also emphasizes their absolute indispensability. However, as in the previous example, I want to highlight that it is not entirely clear if the principles of logic are really in us from birth through the *fiṭra* or it only *seems that way.* By that I mean, they are so ingrained they seem natural, but they might still be acquired at a young age.

However, further on in the work al-Fārābī offers a clearer connection between the *fiṭra* as the distinguishing feature of the human animal and the issue of the intelligibles. For in a different section the author turns to explaining the Arabic term for logic (*manṭiq*). According to al-Fārābī the description of *manṭiq* is appropriate, deriving from the Arabic for *logos* (*nuṭq*). Following the

[56] AR in Amīn, 53.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Et in Jaffray, 386f (modified); AR in Amīn, 54.
[59] Cf. AR in Amīn, 59.

'ancients,' he then explains that there are three senses of *manṭiq*: the first is "the external sayings of speech, which is that by which the tongue expresses what is in the innermost being (*ḍamīr*);"[60] the second are "sayings located in the soul, which are the intelligibles (*maʿqūlat*) which the utterances point to;"[61] and the third is the "created (*maftūra*) spiritual faculty (*qūwa*) in man by which he is particularly distinguished from other animals."[62] This third sense, through use of the term 'faculty' (*qūwa*) as well as the adjective 'created' (from *f-ṭ-r*), is a reference to *fiṭra.* As al-Fārābī explains further:

> [This faulty] is that by which man obtains the intelligibles (*maʿqūlat*), and the sciences (*ʿulūm*), and the arts (*ṣanāʾiʿ*); also that by which there is deliberation (*rawīyya*) and that by which one distinguishes the beautiful/good (*jamīl*) from the ugly/reprehensible *(qabīḥ*). And it is found in all men, even in children, but in a small amount which has not reached its full activity: like the strength of the child's leg upon walking or a fire of weak light that has not reached burning the tree stump. And it is in the insane and the drunk like the eye of cross-eyed/squinting and in the sleeping like the eye that is closed and in unconscious like the eye veiled by a cloud of vapor or something like that.[63]

This passage highlights not only the connection between logical principles, ethical knowledge, and *fiṭra* but also *fiṭra's* basic equality as a faculty as much as its unequal quality across different kinds of people. Al-Fārābī's summary of the naming of logic, justifying the name 'logic' by the fact that it applies to all three strands elaborated above, finally confirms that the created (*maftūra*) 'faculty' (*qūwa*) is *fiṭra* as he says that the third *logos* "is in the human being by *fiṭra.*"[64] An additional thing to notice here is the claim that it is by the *fiṭra* that we distinguish the 'beautiful' from the 'reprehensible.' We will return to this question of the ethical content and function of *fiṭra* in more

[60] AR in Amīn, 62.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] ET in Jaffray, 393 (modified); AR in Amīn, 62f. This quote is a good example for the claim that in al-Fārābī's conception *fiṭra* is not a dual character concept; rather, this is a matter of degree (cf. n. 6 on p. 5f, as well n. 125 on p. 307).
[64] AR in Amīn, 63. The same vision of logic, its aims, comparison to grammar, and reason for naming also appears in al-Fārābī's introductory *Risāla* on logic, the *Risāla ṣudira bihāʾ l-kitāb* (ed. D. M. Dunlop, *The Islamic Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1957): 224-35). This work, most likely, was meant to head his version of the *Organon.* While the language here regarding the third use of *logos* also uses the term 'faculty' (*qūwa*) no explicit naming of that faculty as *fiṭra* occurs.

detail below. For now, the idea of a particular human, unevenly developed, rationally relevant faculty of *fiṭra* is clear.

Al-Fārābī's *Book of Letters* also underlines the connection between different kinds of knowledge and *fiṭra.*[65] As Khalidi explains, al-Fārābī in this work assumes a tripartite division of discourses that became central in later centuries, between rhetorical (*khaṭabiyya*), dialectical (*jadaliyya*), and demonstrative (*burḥāniyya*) (and to which he also added, in other works, sophistry and poetics). While many people are engaged in the first two, the third "is the province of an elite class of philosophers, who use it to achieve certainty." [66] The difference between these discourses has to do with their premises and thus certainty (*yaqīn*): rhetoric is based on persuasive opinions, dialectics on commonly shared opinions, and demonstrations "start from first principles or self-evident premises."[67] But there is also a historical aspect to this, with rhetoric appearing first; the many disputes that arise from such a method make people search for more certainty: "eventually, the method of demonstration or certainty emerges, which is applied to theoretical matters as well as to political affairs and other practical matters, which pertain to human volition."[68] However, since not all people—on account of their *fiṭra*— are able to participate in demonstrative exercises, the need for a lawgiver as well as religion emerges, conveying truths to the people in a way

[65] Another part of the *Organon,* the *De Interpretatione,* also applies Aristotelian logic to the Arabic context and does so with reference to *fiṭra.* Thus, when al-Fārābī explicitly defends an idea such as 'possibility' against potential critics, *fiṭra* as the source of the first intelligibles also makes a regular appearance. We know that the original Greek was translated into Arabic by Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910), from an intermediary Syriac translation made by his father Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (d. 873). Here al-Fārābī first of all affirms that "the process of investigation in logic and philosophy all together builds on and proceeds from *fiṭra* or what follows from such knowledge" (*Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's* De Interpretatione, trans. Fritz W. Zimmermann (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 77). Following Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics,* he then affirms "the existence of possibility [contested by some commentators] is evident to us from our *fiṭra*" (ibid.). Even if many do not acknowledge this and other such truth verbally, such lack of acceptance does not negate what Aristotle claimed: "that his mind naturally acknowledges it" (ibid.).

[66] Khalidi, *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings,* xiv.

[67] Khalidi, *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings,* xv.

[68] Khalidi, *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, xvi.

appropriate for them. While all humans to some extent participate in reason and thus share their human *fiṭra* at the broadest level, some are much better than others in certain types of reasoning.[69]

Al-Fārābī's engagement with another central Aristotelian work, the *Categories* (*Kitāb Qāṭāghūriyās ay al-maqūlāt*),[70] also appears to introduce *fiṭra* (similar to what we saw in his engagement with the *Posterior Analytics*) but does so in a way that connects to the other two aspects, beyond logic, that are anchored in al-Fārābī's vision of *fiṭra.* When writing about 'quality' (*kayfiyya*) he describes how an individual is divided into four genera, the first of those being habit (*malaka*) and state (*ḥāl*) and the second being the natural power (*quwwa ṭabīʿiyya*).[71] When discussing examples of the latter, he takes great pains to distinguish such natural powers from habits that come about by custom: the natural powers are characterized by

> the natural dispositions (*ʾistiʿdād*) by which bodies act with ease and are acted upon with difficulty […]. Similarly, the natural disposition which exists in the body of a man to do a particular action, e.g. wrestling, boxing, and running is a natural power (*quwwa ṭabīʿiyya*). As for what he acquires by custom of skill in wrestling and excellent craftiness in winning at boxing and running, it does not enter into this genus [i.e. the natural power], but into habit (*malaka*) and state (*ḥāl*), because it is an art and form which has resulted from custom.

[69] An argument we will return to time and again over the next few chapters, though particularly so in Ibn Rushd.

[70] In the following I refer to the Arabic and English text of the *Paraphrase* published by D.M. Dunlop in *Al-Fārābī's Paraphrase of the* Categories *of Aristotle* (*The Islamic Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1958): 168-96 and *The Islamic Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1959): 21-54). The Arabic version of the *Categories* available to al-Fārābī was most likely that by Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn which has been edited by J.T. Zenker as *Kitāb Arisṭūṭālis al-musammá qāṭīghūriyā ay al-maqūlāt = Aristotelis Categoriae* (Lipsiae: Sumtibus Guil. Engelmann, 1846).

[71] On al-Fārābī's use of the terms disposition (*hayʾa*) and *malaka* (habit) in particular, and broader Arabic thought in general, see Erez Naaman, "Nurture over Nature: Habitus from al-Fārābī through Ibn Khaldūn to ʿAbduh" (*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 137 (January-March 2017): 1-24). According to his reading of the *Paraphrase, fiṭra* in al-Fārābī offers the first intelligibles as well as some dispositions. And while character traits are acquired, just like crafts, there is a role for natural diversity: "before attaining the skill, this good performance is possible to achieve by inborn potentiality, and following its attainment, by actually practicing the craft. Likewise, before attaining a noble character trait, a noble action is possible to achieve by inborn potentiality, and following its attainment, by actually performing the action" ("Nurture over Nature," 7). This process of moral formation he also connects to political philosophy, arguing that "the citizens of the virtuous city, however—in addition to being endowed with excellent inborn natures (*fiṭar*) allowing them to do specific things—acquire dispositions and habitus (*hayʾāt wa-malakāt*) that are voluntary, not natural, by which they perform their actions in the city. Hence, they belong in the city ("constitute parts of the city") not only by virtue of their inborn natures, but also by the voluntary habitus (*al-malakāt al-irādiyya*) they acquire, such as those of the various crafts (ṣināʿāt)" (ibid.). Finally, the interrelation of inborn and acquired characteristics highlights the need for excellent political leadership: "the perfect functioning of the city, for which the element of volition, as distinguished from predisposition, is so crucial, cannot occur without the guidance and supervision of the leader. The leader of the virtuous city must (1) be predisposed for leadership by his inborn nature (*al-fiṭra wa-l-ṭabʿ*) and (2) attain the voluntary habitus of leadership (*al-hayʾa wa-l-malaka al-irādiyya al-riʾāsiyya*), for which he is prepared by virtue of his inborn nature" ("Nurture over Nature," 8).

> Similarly, the disposition of the body to produce excellently the action of some art, when it is by nature (*ṭabʿ*) and *fiṭra*, belongs to this genus but the art is in condition and state.[72]

While I will get to the significance of this argument for al-Fārābī's conception of *fiṭra's* ethical knowledge later, what matters at this point is the explicit reference to *fiṭra* here. Setting it in parallel with *ṭabʿ*, al-Fārābī chooses *fiṭra* to explain the idea of a naturally anchored ability that is furthered by habit and custom. In his teacher's translation of the *Categories* there is a comparable discussion of habituation in terms of *ḥāl* and *malaka* that also uses the standard Arabic term for the Aristotelian *physis*, *ṭabīʿa,* but makes no reference to *fiṭra.*[73] We might say that this is an unsurprising finding given that the said teacher was a Christian who had little reason to use a Qur'anic term.[74] Additionally, this quotation alerts us to the notion of differing, natural excellences rooted in *fiṭra* that have surfaced several times in the above discussion. This sense of inherited dispositions, natural and shared but unequally spread, moves us from the question of Aristotelian first principles to al-Fārābī's political theory. Here too he uses *fiṭra* to comment upon ideas received from his sources, clarifying them and making them meaningful to his audience through an employment of the concept in ways consistent with his logical writings.[75]

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[72] ET in Dunlop (1958), 191 (modified); AR in Dunlop (1958), 177.

[73] J.T. Zenker, *Kitāb Arisṭūṭālis al-musammá qāṭīghūriyā ay al-maqūlāt = Aristotelis Categoriae*, 27ff.

[74] I should add that in his *Reminder to the Way of Happiness* (*Kitāb al-tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*) al-Fārābī also mentions the first principles as the basis of logic, in all men (even if they are not always aware of it). The basic idea is that "since logic is the first thing one pursues in a scientific manner, it is necessary that the first principles (*al-ʾawāʾil*) pursued are knowable things that the human being knows beforehand and that cannot be taken away from his knowledge" (*Kitāb al-tanbīh,* AR in *Rasāʾil al-Fārābī* (Hyderabad, 1936), 24). He further emphasizes that "all of these things the knowledge of which no one can take away are innate to the human being's mind from the beginning of his existence" (*Kitāb al-tanbīh,* 25). One might not always be aware of this knowledge or have it muddled up. But generally, humans merely need be reminded that this is in their minds.

[75] Deborah Black raises the important question of al-Fārābī's stance on the Platonic concept of recollection or whether education is through experience or anchored in the soul ("Al-Fārābī on Meno's Paradox," in *In the Age of al-Fārābī: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century,* ed. Peter Adamson (London: The Warburg Institute, 2008), 15-34). According to Black (according to the discussed passage on recollection in the *Harmony*), al-Fārābī sides with Aristotle. All knowledge is due to experience and there is thus no knowledge ingrained in the soul, even if we are not always as aware of this fact (since some knowledge appears so natural to us). On the question of recollection vs. an external source of knowledge see also Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 15. Davidson mentions a contemporary of Farābī, Bakr al-Mawṣilī (d. 914). His treatise *On the Soul* (*Fī'l-nafs*) reflects a belief in the existence of innate universals in the human soul (see also Zvi Y. Langermann, "Bakr al-Mawṣilī" (in *EI THREE*) and Shlomo Pines, "La Doctrine de l'intellect selon Bakr al-Mawṣilī" (in *Studis in the History of Arabic*

My impression that recourse to *fiṭra* helps al-Fārābī first of all anchor the first intelligibles (either as something that is indeed naturally in us or at the very least came to us so early, that we do not remember how and thus *think* these principles are natural) and second, helps Farābī explain the natural division of people in their logical abilities (which in turn has clear political implications)[76] receives support also from another work, his *Philosophy of Aristotle.*[77] While his use of *fiṭra* in the work as a whole is limited, al-Fārābī does speak of *fiṭra* when describing the different abilities of some with respect to logic over others. Here *fiṭra* (amending a predominant use of *ṭabʿ*), seems to bolster the political implications of a divinely ordained, innate difference in human abilities. Put differently, it seems *fiṭra* language aids the use of *ṭabʿ* in pointing to an origin for the asserted innate human difference in (logical) abilities. Thus, we read that "men as a whole are equipped by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) for different approaches to truth and for discerning it and having it established in their souls by different sorts of knowledge."[78] Consequently, those who by nature

Philosophy, ed. Shlomo Pines (repr. Jerusalem 1996), 193-207) and "A Tenth Century Philosophical Correspondence" (in *Studies in the History of Jewish Thought,* ed. Shlomo Pines (repr. Jerusalem 1997), 177-210).

[76] See Demetra Kasimis on the idea that the *Republic's* myth of metals and its attending noble lie (regarding the naturalness of the different classes of society or metals) did not prescribe but rather expose certain politics by laying "bare the 'artifice' (mēchanē [414b]) by which regimes, including classical Athens, produce membership status as a naturalized categories" ("Plato's Open Secret," *Contemporary Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (2016): 339). As a result, the idea of "the noble lie is better read as revealing– not concealing – that the 'natural' distinctions of an exclusionary citizenship politics are the effects of willful political power" ("Plato's Open Secret," 340). I think the use of *fiṭra* functions in place of a foundational myth and noble lie, assigning the 'natural' differences of humans as endowments from most high authority and thus justifying social differentiation (as social positions or receptivity for first principles are in line with what is given by *fiṭra* or *physis*). However, this is not to neglect the foundational role of formation we have seen and will see particularly when it comes to character development. In this context Kasimis's comment on *physis* is also interesting: "The meanings of physis in classical thought generally militate against a consistent, unitary or pre-discursive notion of physis even within a single thinker or text. Plato's dialog presents us with a sense of the multiple and conflicting articulations the 'natural' can take, not simply between two polities but within one. Even when the dialog appears to employ physis to refer to a person's origin or character, it does so in a way that emphasizes the plastic quality of nature – its mutability and its vulnerability to the creative power of mimesis" ("Plato's Open Secret," 350). Nature is quite fluid until more fully determined in culture and politics. Ancestry and blood matter less as people can have different dispositions and, additionally, chose to develop them differently. While certain familiar relations might make it more likely that like and like are born, pure endowment is not enough; the habit one develops is ultimately significant (even if one's original endowment does seriously affect one's ability of developing certain habits).

[77] In the following I translate from the edition published by Mahdi in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* (Beirut:Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1961). In some parts I modify Mahdi's own English translation published in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962).

[78] ET in Mahdi (1962), 87; AR in Mahdi (1961), 77f.

(*ṭabʿ*) and *fiṭra* have the earlier-enumerated qualities belong to the elect; "the one who does not possess these states belongs by nature (*ṭabʿ*) to the ordinary people."[79] Such people, al-Fārābī adds, "should know the things with regard to which the certain science is possible [i.e. logic] by some other sciences."[80]

Based on what I have described so far, *fiṭra* appears to be a concept that al-Fārābī uses to describe a particular human faculty that at once distinguishes humans from other animals and among each other. There is a near-universality among humans to make use of this faculty in theory and thus engage the broad capacity to reason (through the provided first intelligibles). In this respect, all humans are *reasoning* animals (assuming that they are grown up and of sound mental status). However, I also showed that despite the general idea of a human faculty, the capacity for reasoning in al-Fārābī knows multiple levels; and its ability to engage in its higher forms is something only a few seem to have (or at least exercise fully). In this respect, it feels like only some humans are really *reasoning* animals in the most perfect sense. Finally, it seems that to make these arguments regarding both a general and sure foundation of basic logical principles *and* a natural human hierarchy, al-Fārābī consciously added to a widespread use of *ṭabʿ*/*ṭabīʿa* in his Arabic sources the term *fiṭra*.

iii) The need for sociality

Given that the human *fiṭar* are not merely varying but of differing quality, solitude is no option. As we have already seen, the question of natural hierarchies by *fiṭra* as well as the idea that natural endowments are not only diverse but insufficient relates to the issue of human sociability.

[79] ET in Mahdi (1962), 87 (modified); AR in Mahdi (1961), 78.
[80] Ibid. He reiterates this when discussing the different ways of conveying truth to the general people through means such as rhetoric or images: "The ordinary people need not conceive and comprehend these things as they are" (ET in Mahdi (1962), 93 (modified); AR in Mahdi (1961), 85.

It is by the *fiṭra* that the human being is not merely a rational but also a political animal since it is through society that she can counter the limitations that arise on the basis of naturally diverse and differently excellent *fiṭar*.

It is well-known that al-Fārābī was the first Islamic thinker to write on matters of political theory more generally and also the first to leave works commenting on Platonic thought more specifically.[81] He did so primarily through three works concerned with governance (broadly construed): *Views of the Inhabitants of the Perfect City* (or *On the Perfect State*), *The Political Regime,* and a selection of aphorisms (*Selected Aphorisms;* formerly known as *Aphorisms of the Statesman*).[82] All three assume that, on the basis of their varying *fiṭar*, human beings need sociality since they are dependent on others to fulfill all the needs necessary for their flourishing. In what follows I will examine the role of *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī's political thought not merely in those three works but also several others, following scholars such as Gutas, Janos, and Vallat[83] in seeing his political thought as an outgrowth of his broader views of the world.[84]

[81] On the role of Farābī in the history of Islamic political thought see Erwin Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*: *An Introductory Outline* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 112-142.

[82] As Galston notes, however, it is a well-known problem in the study of these works that we do not known what to make of the fact that al-Fārābī wrote multiple treatises on the same topic without giving any indication of why he wrote these different treatises, or at what time (*Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of Alfarabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3).

[83] For a broad typology see Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century. An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy" (*BriMES* 29, no. 1 (2002): 5-25).

[84] Rather than, as earlier generations of thinkers following in the footsteps of Mahdi (including Galston and Parens) had, seeing it as a form of hiding his true philosophical commitments. See Janos's comments on al-Fārābī's political thought as "essentially dependent on, and a continuation of, his metaphysical reflection and his views on the order and hierarchy of existence and learning. Indeed, the microcosms of the individual and of the political entity should be organised in accordance with the fundamental laws governing the universe, with the result that the best political system is one constructed on a sound philosophical foundation and a thorough grasp of scientific laws and principles. This belief is textually and structurally apparent in al-Fārābī's philosophical compendia, in that he switches to a discussion of politics only after having treated theology, cosmology, and physical and psychological issues" ("al-Fārābī"). Additionally, Gutas has emphasized the detrimental impact that Straussian readings of al-Fārābī have had on scholarship (forcing it to focus exclusively on his 'political philosophy;' cf. "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," 22.)

In his *Book on the Attainment of Happiness* (*Kitāb taḥṣīl al- saʿāda*)[85] al-Fārābī clearly affirms that sociality is natural for humans and the necessary condition for the achievement of their particular kind of perfection. They are social by nature given their natural divergences. For, in line with what we have already seen, we read that "the natural principles (*al-mabādiʾ al-ṭabīʿiyya*) which are in the human being and in the world are not sufficient for the human being to reach the perfection for whose achievement he is made."[86] Instead, the human being needs some "logical (*nuṭqiyya*) and intellectual (*ʿaqliyya*) principles with which to strive toward that perfection."[87] In addition to these principles, humans need others to attain perfection as human endowment is both rudimentary and variable:

> each man achieves only a portion of that perfection, and what he achieves of this portion increases or decreases, since it is not possible that a single individual achieves all the perfections by himself and without the aid of many other people. Verily, *it is the fiṭra of every man to join another human being or other people in his necessary striving.* And this is the condition (*ḥāl*) of every single human being. Thus, to achieve what is possible of that perfection, every human being needs to stay in the proximity of others and associate with them. It is also in the natural (*ṭabīʿiyya*) *fiṭra* of this animal to seek shelter and to dwell in the proximity of those who are in his species. For this reason, it is called the *social* (*ʾinsi) and* political (*madanī*) animal.[88]

There is, then, first of all a *fiṭri* need for sociality. Humans by *fiṭra* are sociable.[89] However, unsurprisingly, while this need is common to all human beings, the kind of perfection each strives for by this sociality varies. As al-Fārābī adds a few lines down, when discussing the purpose of political science, what matters is "knowing the things by which the people of cities attain happiness through political association, each in the measure prepared for him by the *fiṭra.*"[90] Having noted

[85] In the following I modify the English translation published by Muhsin Mahdi in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Ithaca; New York: Cornell University Press, 1963). The references to the Arabic text are to the edition published by Yāsīn al-Jaʿfar as *Kitāb taḥṣīl al- saʿāda* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1981).
[86] ET in Mahdi (1963), 59 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, 60.
[87] ET in Mahdi (1963), 59 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, 60f.
[88] ET in Mahdi (1963), 60 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, 61f.
[89] As the quote makes clear, it is not simply natural for humans to seek others; the reason for that sociability is their naturally varying *fiṭar,* which necessitates the presence of other human beings for cooperation. But in shorthand, it is in the *fiṭra* of each human being to seek sociality.
[90] ET in Mahdi (1963), 61 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, 63.

the political and social nature of the human animal, al-Fārābī clarifies that such characteristics are the result of creation. For "just as it is said that courage resides in the lion, cunningness in the fox […], so it is not impossible that every man is created (*mafṭūran*) upon his soul having a power such that he moves more easily in the direction of the accomplishment of one of the virtues or one of the habits (*malakāt*) than in the direction of doing the opposite act."[91] Invoking many of the themes from the context of logic, al-Fārābī connects both the uniqueness of the human animal per see and its diversity among other humans through the notion of natural dispositions rooted in the *fiṭra.*[92]

In order to think more explicitly about the nature of the sociality thus posed as necessary for human perfection we ought to turn to al-Fārābī's more overtly political works. Although there is no agreement as to the ordering of al-Fārābī's corpus in general and the political writings in particular, it is standard practice to assume that his *On the Perfect State* (*Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīnat al-fāḍila*)[93] is the most mature of his works, completed just before his death.[94] While his vision of *fiṭra* fits into my description thus far, the political works give a particular weight to the question of human hierarchy and social order.[95]

What is most noteworthy is that Farābī makes recourse to *fiṭra* in this work when considering the human need for social organization (or what al-Fārābī calls in his own summary

[91] ET in Madi (1963), 69 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, 76.
[92] We will return to the interplay between what all share and what differentiates some in Ibn Rushd.
[93] I use the edition and translation by Richard Walzer published in *Alfarabi on the Perfect State: ʾAbū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). The references are to his pagination, with the Arabic first and the English second. When I modify his translation, I indicate thusly.
[94] Some, however (such as Dunlop), disagree with this ordering, placing *On the Perfect State* (942/3) before *The Political Regime* (around 948/9). As Walzer notes in his introduction, the work is seemingly neither intended for a general public nor a highly professional one. Instead, Walzer believes, al-Fārābī here aims to "naturalize the material which he is introducing into the Muslim world to which he belonged, and by doing this to give a new […] answer to the intellectual as well as religious and political questions of his century" (*Alfarabi on the Perfect State*, 6). The audience we might thus imagine is one of well-educated Muslims but not professional philosophers.
[95] The work's structure resembles that of a funnel as al-Fārābī moves from the eternal world (chs. 1-3), to the sublunary one (chs. 4-9), then on to man's nature (chs. 10-14), human society (chs. 15-17), and finally an engagement with different types of ignorant states (chs. 18-19).

of the book the section on "man's need for association and cooperation,"[96] rather than in his discussion of the intellect. Thus, already in the opening of the section al-Fārābī notes that people are created (*mafṭūr*) so as to be in need of many things they cannot provide for themselves. As a result, humans need other people:

> it is not possible that man shall achieve the perfection for the sake of which his natural (*ṭabīʿyya*) *fiṭra* was given to him, except many societies of people who cooperate come together who each supply everybody else with some particular need of his, so that as a result of the contribution of the whole community all the things are brought together which everybody needs in order to preserve himself and to attain perfection.[97]

Human sociality is a result of the particular nature of the human *fiṭra,* being the means of achieving that perfection the human being was destined for. While the pairing with *ṭabīʿyya* is somewhat strange, the basic point stands: sociality is necessary for human perfection given its variability and limitations.

When moving to an engagement of human community, al-Fārābī's varying conception of *fiṭra* again comes to the fore. For after discussing the need for association, al-Fārābī introduces his readers to the excellent city which resembles a perfect body. In the context of the analogy, he clarifies the following:

> the limbs and organs of the body are different and their *fiṭar* and faculties are unequal in excellence, there being among them one ruling organ, namely the heart, and organs which are close in rank to that ruling organ, each having been given by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) a faculty by which it performs its proper function in conformity with the natural (*ṭabʿ*) aim of that ruling organ […]. The same holds good in the case of the city. Its parts are of different *fiṭar* and the dispositions (*hayʾāt*) are unequal in excellence.[98]

Using the analogy between city and body it is thus clear that the different members of the former are of different *fiṭra.* And there is not merely difference but in fact hierarchy as the analogy with the body shows. While *fiṭra* and *ṭabʿ* appear interchangeable the overwhelming point here is inequality. That the meaning of this inequality is primarily for the context of ruling is clear from

[96] ET in Walzer, 46/47.
[97] ET in Walzer, 228/229 (modified).
[98] Ibid., 230f/231f.

the fact that following the above quote, al-Fārābī immediately moves from the city to the ruler, explaining the hierarchical structure of the political organization. We learn that in the city, "there is a man who is the ruler and there are others whose ranks are close to the ruler, each of them with a disposition (*hayʾa*) and a habit through which he performs an action in conformity with the intention of that ruler; these are the holders of the first rank."[99]

While in the description of the first ranks there is no use of *fiṭra* (but rather of the attending 'disposition' (*hayʾa*)), al-Fārābī returns to the analogy between body and city highlighting both the divergence of natural excellences and the need for formation with respect to these excellences:

> the limbs and organs of the body are natural (*ṭabīʿiyya*) and dispositions (*hayʾāt*) that they have are natural (*ṭabīʿyya*) faculties (*qūwwa*) […], the dispositions (*hayʾāt*) *and* habits by which they perform their actions in the city are not natural (*ṭabīʿyya*) but voluntary (*ʾirādīyya*); notwithstanding that the parts of the city are created (*maṣṭūrūn*) by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*), provided with *fiṭar* unequal in excellence by which people are suited to one thing and not another. But it is not that they are parts of the city by their *fiṭar* alone but by the voluntary habits which they acquire such as the arts and things like that. And the faculty which is in the organs of the body by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) to them corresponds in the parts of the city the voluntary habits (*malakāt*) and dispositions (*hayʾāt*).[100]

Besides the divergence of *fiṭar,* there is a clear sense of *fiṭra* as a) an excellent disposition that sets the ruler apart (and as such appears in parallel with nature and disposition); and b) one that needs to be further developed. This conception continues in al-Fārābī's exposition of the ruler:

> The ruler of the excellent city cannot just be any man, because rulership requires two conditions: first, he should be predisposed to it by *fiṭra* and nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) and second he should have the disposition (*hayʾa*), and voluntary habit (*al-malaka al-ʾirādīyya*) of rulership which will develop in someone whose *fiṭar* by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) are predisposed for it. Nor is every art suitable for rulership, most of the arts indeed are rather suited for service within the city, just as most *fiṭar* are *fiṭar* of service.[101]

Rulers are both predisposed to ruling and need to be formed fully to be rulers. The political importance of *fiṭra* as an aid in describing what sets some apart is plain. However, as we have

[99] ET in Walzer*,* 232/233.
[100] Ibid.*,* 232f/233f.
[101] Ibid., 238/239. Al-Fārābī, a little earlier, had linked the ruler to the heart in the body as "the most perfect part of the city in his specific qualification and has the best of everything which anybody else shares with him; beneath him are people who are ruled by him and rule others" (ET in Walzer, 234/235). Like the heart which brings about the body, the ruler brings about the city and orders it (ET in Walzer*,* 236/237).

repeatedly seen at this point, the excellent *fiṭra* is in fact not sufficient. Leadership is a combination of nature and nature.

In addition to the positive argument from the use of *fiṭra* to hierarchically organize people in the context of governance, it is noteworthy that outside this chapter on human organization the concept does not show up in the rest of *On the Perfect State.* For one thing, the early discussions of the human intellect generally, as well as the faculty of reason in particular, exclusively use the concepts of disposition (*hayʾa*) and nature (*ṭabʿ*) to make their points.[102] Second, when al-Fārābī turns to the topic of the failing cities and their inhabitants, he is equally silent on *fiṭra.* Chapter 16 examines the different classes of people and their happiness, which is a mixture of the requirements people have by their commonalities across classes and those they have as members of a certain class. The language, however, is all via the concept of disposition (*hayʾa*) we encountered above.[103] Similarly, when discussing the difference between the philosophers, who know the truth in itself, and the masses who need symbols, the explanation refers to the fact that "neither by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) nor by custom (*ʿāda*)"are they able to understand things as they are.[104]

Beyond affirming the human need for sociality, the major emphasis of al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* in *On the Perfect State* is thus its utility when it comes to the divergence between the natural

[102] Cf. chapters 10-13, e.g. 180, 198, 200, 202.

[103] Generally speaking, al-Fārābī's' concern with the different classes of people is on display in his 'Discourse of Recommendations Useful to All Who Belong to the Various Classes of Society' (*Kalām fī waṣāyā yaʾumm nafsu-hā jamʿī man yastaʿmilu-hā min ṭabaqāt al-nās;* also known as *Risāla fiʾ-l-ṣiyāsa* (*Epistle on Politics*)). The work focuses entirely on the three classes and their appropriate behavior towards each other. As Georges Tamer has noted with respect to *ṣiyāsa*, "the term expresses a hierarchical relationship that fundamentally rests on the natural inequality between the one who governs and the governed" (*Islamische Philosophie und die Krise der Moderne: das Verhältnis von Leo Strauss zu Alfarabi, Avicenna und Averroes* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 239 (my translation from the German)). However, there is no reference to *fiṭra* in the work and, very interestingly, there is major doubt whether it is indeed authentic (Rudolph, *Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt,* 406).

[104] ET in Walzer, 278/279. Though Walzer rightfully notes here that the described inability of non-philosophers is an inability by nature, which in this work al-Fārābī expresses by using *biʾl-ṭabʿ* and in the *Ṣiyasa* (which I will look at in greater detail in the next section) *bi-l-fiṭra* (*Alfarabi on the Perfect State,* 475).

endowments of those who rule and those who are ruled.[105] The three main traits of the concept here are its innateness, its variability, and its being the seat of certain desirable qualities. And as we saw, these characteristics eventually lead to a hierarchical conception of the society needed by all. Now since this use is very clearly restricted to one chapter, I think it likely that al-Fārābī seeks to explain something in the political context, namely the inherent qualification of those who rule; and he does so by using a concept that originates in the religious sources of his Islamic audience. In short, when getting to the natural sociability of humanity, its complex needs, diverse talents, and resulting requirement for cooperation according to differing abilities, al-Fārābī resorts to the Qur'anic *fiṭra* to explain what he deems a necessary social and political hierarchy. This use to back up diversity and hierarchy or order seems to resemble the arguments regarding logic above, where references to *fiṭra* explained the source of the principles of logic and the natural suitedness of some to certain kinds of discourse over others. I might add, however, that my assumption at this point is that *fiṭra* is, due to its origin in the Qur'an, a particularly Islamic and religious term. While I will further clarify the grounds for this disagreement below, I want to emphasize already that I disagree with Walzer's broader argument regarding the irreligious language of the work and hence also his argument that al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* is of no religious significance.[106]

iv) The best society

Given *fiṭra's* need for and benefits from sociality, the question arises as to the best kind of social formation for the differing *fiṭar* that come together. In brief, al-Fārābī's vision of the best

[105] Walzer, commenting on the opening passage of chapter 15 I described above, notes that "al-Fārābī deliberately refrains from describing human 'nature' as the work and gift of God" but in the same breath acknowledges that "he uses here *fiṭra* and other derivations from this root instead of *ṭabīʿa* and *ṭabʿ*" (*Alfarabi on the Perfect State*, 429).
[106] In his commentary section, Walzer argues for an equivalence between *fiṭra* and *ṭabīʿa*, describing both simply as an 'inborn nature' (*Alfarabi on the Perfect State,* 482, n. 930). I devote more attention to this question below.

society is one ordered by *fiṭar,* allowing those of exceptional abilities to guide those less fortunate. This is most clear in *The Political Regime* (*al-Ṣiyasa al-madaniyya;* also known as *The Treatise on the Principles of Being*).[107] Moving from cosmology to humanity's place therein, what is most significant is, as Charles Butterworth points out, the conviction that "political arrangements should take into account that human beings are not equal. Even more, those setting down political arrangements should observe the natural differences or inequality of talents that exist among human beings."[108] Considering these natural differences is crucial to what according to the text is the ruler's primary duty: to attain true happiness by moving from a status as potential to becoming an actual intellect.[109] What is most relevant to my inquiry is that as in the case of *On the Perfect State, fiṭra* in *The Political Regime* does not appear in discussions of the forms, materials, and natures found in the cosmos but again is part of the section dedicated to politics or human association. As in the above examples, the connection and overlap with *ṭabʿ* and *ṭabʿia* is clear. Most importantly, al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* in this work connects explicitly to what I have argued is owed to his conception of Aristotelian logic: having a healthy *fiṭra* means receiving the first intelligibles. However, this is not an ability shared equally by all but rather differentiates people. This differentiation has political significance, allowing some to guide others. In what follows we will lay out the details of al-Fārābī's process of thinking on these matters.

As in *On the Perfect State,* the relevant section starts off by noting humanity's need for association in order to attain happiness. The discussion of *fiṭra* occurs when al-Fārābī ponders how humans might attain happiness and who can do so. What is most foundational to this discussion

[107] In the following I translate from the Arabic text edited by Fauzī M. Najjār and published in *al-Ṣiyasa al-madaniyya* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964). Unless otherwise indicated, the following are all my own translations. In some cases, I rely follow or modify a translation published by Butterworth in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings* (Vol.2) (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2015).
[108] *Alfarabi: The Political Writings* (Vol.2), 22.
[109] Cf. AR in Najjār, 33 (on this process of becoming actual).

and significant for al-Fārābī's overall vision of *fiṭra,* connection to politics and logic*,* is that at its most basic, "it was the intention behind the existence of the human being that he obtain happiness."[110] And this attainment of happiness is possible only by "the active intellect having first given the primary intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwal*), which are the primary cognitions (*al-maʿārif al-ʾawwal*)."[111] While the connection between happiness and the reception of the first intelligibles is thus clear, what is particularly crucial is what al-Fārābī notes next: "not every human being is created (*yufṭar*) prepared to receive the first intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwal*), because individuals are by nature (*ṭibʿa*) made with varied faculties and divergent preparations. Thus, some of them do not receive by nature (*ṭabʿ*) anything from the primary intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwal*)."[112] Al-Fārābī then explains in what way people can receive the intelligibles: while some do not get any, others receive them "in a different way, like mad men."[113] And again others, as we saw above, receive them "as they are."[114] These, who receive the intelligibles "are the ones whose *fiṭar* are sound (*salīma*) and these in particular, not the others, are able to achieve happiness."[115] The connection between humanity's basic telos by *fiṭra* (i.e. attaining happiness) and social cooperation is thus clear and ultimately goes back to the central features of the human *fiṭra* we have identified: its variability, its indeterminacy, and its possibility for education.[116]

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[110] AR in Najjār*,* 74.

[111] Ibid. A little earlier al-Fārābī already explained that the human being attains perfection through the active intellect: "it first gives the human being a faculty (*qūwa*) and a principle (*mabdaʾ*) by which to strive, or by which the human being is able to strive on his own for the rest of the perfections that remain for him. That principle is the primary sciences and the primary intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwal*) attained in the rational part of the soul. It gives him those cognitions and those intelligibles only after the human being first proceeds and attains the sense-perceptive and the appetitive parts of the soul through which there come about the longing and loathing following upon sense-perception" (ET in Butterworth (2015), 62 (modified); AR in Najjār, 72.

[112] AR in Najjār, 74f.

[113] AR in Najjār*,* 75.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

[116] This also appears to strengthen the impression from the logical writings that the problem is that people do not receive the intelligibles equally, which explains the unequal spread of logical aptitudes across humanity. Whether contained in or accessed through the *fiṭra,* the fact that *fiṭar* are unequal means that (not withstanding formation and training) people are unequally disposed to the pursuit of logic.

Al-Fārābī clarifies the variability and educability of *fiṭra* and thus the idea that the first intelligibles are at once potentially common to all humans and distributed differently among humans (differentiating them both as members of a community and in their capacity to engage certain philosophical discourses) via a new distinction:

> The people whose *fiṭar* are sound (*salīma*) have a shared (*mushtaraka*) *fiṭra* by which they are disposed to receiving the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) which are shared (*mushtaraka*) among all of them. They strive by it toward objects and actions common (*mushtaraka*) to them. After that, they diverge and differ, thereby coming to *fiṭar* particular to each one and to each group (*ṭāʾifa*). Thus, one among them is disposed to receive certain other intelligibles that are not shared (*mushtaraka*) but are particular [to him] by which he strives towards another genus (*jins*). Another is disposed to receive other intelligibles that are fitting to be used in a certain other genus without one sharing with his companion in any of what is particular to him. One is disposed to receive many intelligibles that are fitting for one thing in a certain genus (*jins*), and another is disposed to receive many intelligibles that are fitting for everything in that genus. Similarly, they may also differ and vary concerning the faculties by which they infer the objects that, concerning a certain genus, are such as to be apprehended by deduction (*istinbāṭ*). Thus, it is not impossible for there to be two who are given the same intelligibles that are fitting for a certain genus, while one of them naturally infers fewer things with respect to that genus by means of those intelligibles and the other (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) has the ability to infer everything that is in that genus (*jins*).[117]

The difference between a basic *fiṭra,* common to all, and more particular endowments is clearly spelled out here. What seems to be contained in the former are basic intelligibles that all have; while the latter, more particular dispositions characterize certain groups of people. As we already know, it is this diversity that at once necessitates and structures human sociality. However, al-Fārābī leaves unclear what the nature of the shared and the divergent intelligibles is. Additionally, the role of further deduction is very clear here, leading to yet more levels of human differentiation (even within the same groups).

Besides variability and educability, al-Fārābī thus clearly also emphasizes the underdetermination of the *fiṭar* familiar to us at this point. *Fiṭra* alone is not enough to determine a person's actions for "the *fiṭar,* which are by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*), do not compel (*taqsir*) anyone or

[117] ET in Butterworth (2015), 65 (modified); AR in Najjār, 75.

force him."[118] Instead, "these *fiṭar* are such that the thing toward which they are disposed by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) becomes easier for them."[119] What the different *fiṭar* do is make certain actions easier.[120] As a result of this natural tendency or ease, which clearly can be overridden or swayed, a need for education arises.

> In addition to what was made natural for them, it is necessary for all of these *fiṭar* to have the will trained and be educated in the things toward which they are disposed in order that through those things they come to their final perfections or close to the final ones. And it may be that there are in a genus (*jins*) great, exceptional *fiṭar* (*ʿaẓīma fāʾiqa*)[121] that are neglected and not trained or educated in the things toward which they are disposed. Thus, as time advances, their strength becomes nullified.[122]

It is not only beneficial for their improvement to direct the *fiṭar.* If people do not hone and direct their natural dispositions, they can wither away. The sense is clearly one of natural tendencies that make certain actions easier but ones that need to be nurtured.[123]

After this conceptual set-up, al-Fārābī draws out the implication of the human *fiṭra* for the political realm. First of all, he emphasizes the variability of people, both between classes and within them:

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[118] AR in Najjār*,* 76.

[119] AR in Najjār, 76. Al-Fārābī seems to make a similar point in his commentary on *De Interpretatione* when he notes that "we know right from the beginning, from our *fiṭra,* that many things have a possibility of occurring and of not occurring, above all, those we know to be left to our choice and will" (Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's* De Interpretatione, 76f). He then goes on to say that "it is not, therefore, the existence of possibility which should be made the subject of inquiry; for our *fiṭra* makes it clear to us that we have the possibility [of acting one way or another] in voluntary matters, where the choice is left to us" (ibid., 77).

[120] ET in Butterworth (2015), 66; AR in Najjār, 76.

[121] We may note that both these adjectives appear in Ibn Bājja's discussion of *fiṭra* as as Ibn Ṭufayl's description of Ḥayy's *fiṭra.*

[122] AR in Najjār, 76.

[123] Al-Fārābī repeats this a little later (though without using *fiṭra*) when he says that "when those possessing natures (*ṭibāʿ*) more defective with respect to a particular genus (*jins*) than the extraordinary nature (*al-ṭibāʿ al-fāʾiqa*) are educated in that genus, they become more excellent than one of the inhabitants with extraordinary natures (*al-ṭibāʿ al-fāʾiqa*) not educated in anything" (ET in Butterworth (2015), 67 (modified); AR in Najjār, 77). Natural endowment makes for an advantage, but education can mitigate one's inferior endowments, even above those better endowed, especially if they do not educate themselves: "so the one having an excellent nature (*fāʾiqa al-ṭabʿ*) with respect to a genus (*jins*), who is educated in everything he is disposed to by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*), is a ruler not only over one not having an extraordinary nature (*fāʾiqa al-ṭabʿ*) with respect to that genus, but also over one having an extraordinary nature (*fāʾiqa al-ṭabʿ*) with respect to that genus who is not educated" (ET in Butterworth (2015), 67 (modified); AR in Najjār, 77). Again the use of the adjectives *fāʾiqa* and *nāqiṣa* is noteworthy here, particularly since al-Fārābī (very curiously, given the rest of the section!) uses *ṭabʿ* (nature) rather than *fiṭra.*

> People vary by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) in accordance with the variation in the rankings of the kinds of arts and sciences toward which they are disposed by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*). Then, those who are disposed by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) toward a certain genus (*jins*) vary in accordance with the variation in the parts of that genus (*jins*) […] Then, those who are naturally disposed to a certain genus (*jins*) or to a part of that genus (*jins*) also vary in accordance with the perfection (*kamāl*) or defectiveness (*naqṣ*)[124] of being disposed (*istiʿadād*).[125]

There is a great variation: for certain arts and sciences and then again within those particular arts and sciences and even smaller aspects of those. Additionally, as we saw above, given that *fiṭar* are insufficient for determining someone, the rankings of people also take their education into account. While curiously using the plural of nature (*ṭabʿ*) here, al-Fārābī argues that people with "equal natures (*ṭabāʾiʿ*) vary with respect to the way they are educated in the things toward which they are disposed."[126] In addition to variation by endowment and education, there is also a third level, peoples' ability to make use of that education; for those "who are equally educated vary according to their ability with respect to deduction (*istinbāṭ*)."[127] Now, taking together what we already know about humanity's highest goal, attaining happiness, and "the difference in *fiṭar* in individuals,"[128] it should not surprise us to learn that "the *fiṭra* of every human being does not of its own accord know happiness or the things that ought to be done."[129] Instead, there is "need for a teacher (*muʿallim*) and a guide (*murshid*)."[130] And unsurprisingly, the need for guidance varies and so does people's ability to make use of such guidance: "the need for guidance of some is little and for some others much guidance is needed."[131] As we will see in later chapters (and particularly so in the case of Ibn Rushd), the role of teachers and guides is crucial for the development of most

[124] Again, this is the term Ibn Ṭufayl uses to describe the *fiṭra* of the masses.
[125] AR in Najjār, 77.
[126] ET in Butterworth (2015), 67 (modified); AR in Najjār, 77.
[127] ET in Butterworth (2015), 67.
[128] AR in Najjār, 78.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid. "Nor, when he is guided to these two [happiness and what needs to be done for it], does he inevitably do what he has been instructed and guided to do without an external spur and being aroused toward it. Most people are like this. Therefore, they need someone who acquaints them with all of that and arouses them to it" (ET in Butterworth (2015), 68).

humans for the *falāsifa.* Be that as it may for now, having explained the people's need for guidance, al-Fārābī transitions to a discussion of the first ruler and those after him.[132]

The happiness that such a ruler guides the people towards is the outcome of a process of practical formation, which occurs in different ways and to differing levels of success among different groups of people. Everyone in this city does what they are meant to, either "on his own or the ruler having guided and prompted him to it"[133] and these actions "make [an individual] acquire good dispositions (*ḥīʾat*) of the soul."[134] That happiness is a habit like writing means that the virtuous actions "strengthen the part of the soul disposed by *fiṭra* toward happiness and make it become actual and perfect."[135] In some, this process eventually leads to shedding of body and attainment of happiness. The discussion of happiness and the role of the ruler therein overall reinforces the ranking of the people by *fiṭar* as well as the role of education demonstrated above: "the rankings of the inhabitants of the city vary with respect to rulership and service in accordance with the *fiṭar* of the inhabitants and in accordance with the way they have been educated."[136]

Another important aspect of this ranking according to *fiṭar* is what such a conception implies for philosophical and religious discourses in the lives of different kinds of people.[137] For

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[132] In this discussion the first ruler is not the one of excellent or perfect *fiṭra* but al-Fārābī here uses *ṭabʿ* (though again in conjunction with Ibn Ṭufayl's *fiṭra* adjectives): "the first ruler without qualification is the one who does not need […] to be ruled by another human being" (ET in Butterworth (2015), 67) He needs no guidance at all, understanding everything and thus being able to guide others. This kind of state exists "in people having great (*ʿaẓīma*), excellent (*fāʾqa*) natures (*ṭibāʿ*), when his soul has joined with the active intellect" (AR in Najjār, 79). Al-Fārābī goes on to explain that this person receives revelation from the active intellect and the people governed by such a ruler are virtuous and happy (AR in Najjār, 80). In his discussion of the ruler in *On the Perfect State,* al-Fārābī uses both *ṭabʿ* and *fiṭra* (cf. ET in Walzer, 246-249).

[133] AR in Najjār*,* 81.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 83.

[137] The connection between different inherent abilities and their respective need for religion or philosophy is also addressed in al-Fārābī's *Book of Letters* (*Kitāb al-ḥurūf*). Here he notes that "the instruction of the select (*khāṣṣ*) is by way of demonstrative method only, whereas the common people are taught by way of dialectical, rhetorical, or poetical methods" (AR in Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Book of Letters,* 152). For this reason, they need a lawgiver, who can represent in images what the multitude cannot comprehend. However, while religion can arise both "from their talents (*qarāʾiḥim*), *fiṭar*, and souls" (ibid.*,* 155) and by transfer from another nation, philosophy only comes about "by their talents (*qarāʾiḥim*) and *fiṭar*" (AR in Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Book of Letters,* 153) and not by import from another nation.

it is a lack of excellence in *fiṭra* that necessitates knowledge of higher things by images, just as Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 1185) tale would tell us. This necessity is the result of several factors: first, al-Fārābī explains, all people need to be aware of "the ultimate principles of the existents, their rankings, happiness, the first rulership that belongs to the virtuous city, and the rankings of its rulership" as well as those actions that bring happiness.[138] Now, a human being "either forms a concept of the principles of the existents [and the like] […] or imagines them." [139] However, since "most people do not have the ability (*qudra*), either by *fiṭra* or by custom (*ʿāda*), to understand these things and form a concept of them,"[140] such people need an image, "by means of things that represent them, of how the principles, their rankings, the active intellect, and the first ruler come about."[141] Such images are provided by religions,[142] whose "meanings and essences are one and not changing"[143] according to al-Fārābī but the way in which they are represented are "many and different"[144] (with some being closer to the truth than others).[145] Because of their inferior *fiṭar,* which, as we saw, primarily means an incomplete access to the intelligibles (as well as lack of education or an

For this reason, religion may arise before philosophy. Underlining the point about different abilities, al-Fārābī concludes the section by noting that some have forbidden philosophy: either because a people cannot be taught the truth, which in turn is due to the fact that because of "the *fiṭar* of its people or the purpose of the nation" they cannot be educated with the candid truth (ibid., 156). Alternatively, a corrupt religion has been established by the lawgiver that made him fear philosophy.

[138] ET in Butterworth (2015), 74.

[139] Ibid. The first, according to al-Fārābī means, "to forma concept of them is to have their essences sketched in the human soul as they exist in truth;" while "to imagine them is to have their images, their likenesses, and the objects representing them sketched in the human soul" (ibid.).

[140] AR in Najjār, 85.

[141] ET in Butterworth (2015), 74.

[142] This is *milal* in the Arabic, as in his *Book of Religion Kitāb al-milla*). It is interesting that the traditionally religious concept of the *fiṭra* supports his arguments for the role of religion: since dispositions and abilities vary (in accordance with divine creation), religions are needed for those who cannot grasp things in themselves.

[143] AR in Najjār, 85.

[144] Ibid.

[145] While certainly very interesting, I do not think I have the space here to explore al-Fārābī's theory of religion and religions beyond its immediate relevance to their connection to diverging *fiṭar.* "The religions of virtuous nations and virtuous cities differ even if they all pursue the very same happiness. For religion is a sketch of these things or of their images in the soul. Since it is difficult for the public to understand these things in themselves and the way they exist, instructing them about these things is sought by others—and those are the ways of representation. So these things are represented to each group or nation by things of which they are more cognizant" (ET in Butterworth (2015), 75).

inability to capitalize on it), most people pursue images rather than relating to what al-Fārābī views as a crucial knowledge of higher concepts themselves.[146]

That ranking by *fiṭar* is of political importance and indeed lies at the bottom of a good society also becomes clear in al-Fārābī's discussion of the less virtuous or failing cities.[147] When

[146] The question of the political importance of *fiṭra* also arises in al-Fārābī *Book on Religion* (*Kitāb al-milla*). Here too he argues that a virtuous religion governs a community, standing under a practical and theoretical philosophy that ensures its veracity. The assumption here is too that each according to their abilities must be led towards happiness. To make the claim about religion governing a community, seeking to order the inhabitants towards true happiness, al-Fārābī discusses the concepts of rulership and political science, which are the main focus of the work. Thus, in section six, on the purpose of dialectic and rhetoric, al-Fārābī notes that both these disciplines are helpful for the ordinary people to evaluate religion. He claims that "most [people] who are taught the opinions of religion and instructed in them and brought to accept its actions are not of such a station [meaning that of the philosophers able to engage in demonstration]—and that is either due to nature (*ṭabʿ*) or because they are occupied" (Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Book of Religion and Related Texts* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1968)*,* 47f). Widespread opinions, not demonstrative proofs, and the approaches of dialectic and rhetoric are good for them. In order to create harmony among such people, religion is needed since demonstration will not do: the virtuous city and thus happiness for the people "is not possible unless there is in the cities a common (*mushtaraka*) religion that brings together their opinions, beliefs, and actions and by it bring their divisions into harmony" (ibid.*,* 66). Only then will they support each other and make possible the achievement of happiness for all.

[147] The *Book of the Attainment of Happiness* also makes clear that the best society is one run by those of exceptional *fiṭra* who are guiding those of lesser capacity. There "some men who by their *fiṭar* have a virtue that corresponds to the highest virtue and that is joined to a superior deliberative power (*quwwa fikriyya*) by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*)" (ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy,* 69 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, *Kitāb taḥsīl al- saʿāda*, 77). Yet this is an exception and one that justifies certain political hierarchies: since "not every human being will possess art, moral virtue, and deliberative virtue with great power […], the prince occupies his place not just by will (*ʾirāda*) but by nature (*ṭabīʿa*)" (ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy,* 69; AR in al-Jaʿfar, *Kitāb taḥsīl al- saʿāda* 77). And "similarly, a subordinate (*khadam*) occupies his place by nature (*ṭabīʿa*) primarily and then secondarily by will (*ʾirāda*), which perfects what is prepared to him by nature (*ṭabīʿa*)" (ibid.). This not only underlines the political utility of these different dispositions but also casts light again on the question of education: "the theoretical virtue, the highest deliberative virtue, the highest moral virtue, and the highest practical art are in those prepared for them by nature (*ṭabʿ*); that is, in those who possess superior natures (*al-ṭibāʾaʿ al-fāʾiqa*) with great potentialities" (ibid.) Thus, while all can and need to perfect their dispositions, the natural variability of these dispositions means that "he who possess such a great power ought to possess the capacity of realizing the particular instances of it in communities and cities" (ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy,* 69 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, *Kitāb taḥsīl al- saʿāda*, 77f). This perfecting is done in two ways: through teaching (just speech) of those able to merely intellectually grasp and develop their happiness; and a formation of character (through habituation), which is for the masses that do so either willingly or by compulsion. Al-Fārābī elaborates the particular constitution of different nations that usually have certain characteristics in common and others more particular to each: "nations and the citizens of cities are composed of some who are the elect and others who are the common people. The common people confine themselves, or should be confined, to theoretical cognitions that are in conformity with unexamined common opinion. The elect do not confine themselves in any of their theoretical cognitions to what is in conformity with unexamined opinion but reach their conviction and knowledge on the basis of premises subjected to thorough scrutiny" (ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy,* 74f (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, *Kitāb taḥsīl al- saʿāda,* 76). This confirms what we already know, that the true philosopher is also a supreme ruler, moving the people to their perfection by means appropriate to each group. Unsurprisingly the question of religion as the imitation of philosophy, suitable for those of less than ideal intellects emerges. The job of translating the truths to the masses is thus one that falls to the first ruler, who is at once the perfect philosopher, imam, and lawgiver (Cf. ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy*, 78f; AR in al-Jaʿfar, *Kitāb taḥsīl al- saʿāda*, 93). That such exceptionality of the true philosopher is based in an exceptional *fiṭra* (and its training!) Al-Fārābī reiterates at the end: such a person "is equipped by *fiṭra* for the theoretical sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-naẓariyya*)—

discussing the timocratic city, he notes that this city resembles the virtuous city by having rankings (*marātib*) of the people (while falling short in other regards).[148] Similarly, when discussing democracy al-Fārābī describes it as a system "where no human being has superiority *(faḍl*) to another in anything at all."[149] Now the way al-Fārābī connects ranking and *fiṭar* here is significant for he says that in a democracy, "the children that come about in it are of very different *fiṭar* and of very different education and upbringing."[150] Such a use of *fiṭra* as aiding human ranking is particularly significant for it appears to betray the influence of the *Republic's* conception of different human natures (which Plato describes with the help of metals of varying value, such as gold, silver and the like).[151] If there is indeed an influence in the idea of naturally ranked natures, the sense of *fiṭra* here would then be closer to a Greek *physis* or nature. I think the use of *fiṭra* functions in place of a foundational myth and noble lie, assigning the 'natural' differences of humans as endowments from the highest authority and thus justifying social differentiation (as social positions or receptivity for first principles are in line with what is given by *fiṭra* or *physis*).[152]

However, emphasizing a potential overlap with the *Republic's* vision of a naturally occurring diversity of human natures and values it is important to again stress the foundational role

which are the conditions Plato mentions in his book on ruling (i.e. *Republic*)" (ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy,* 80; AR in al-Jaʿfar, *Kitāb taḥsīl al- saʿāda,* 94f).

[148] Cf. AR in Najjār, *al-Ṣiyasa al-madaniyya,* 93.

[149] AR in Najjār*,* 99.

[150] Ibid., 100.

[151] I should add that after the failing cities, al-Fārābī discusses the weeds (*nawābit*); they are purely negative for al-Fārābī disturbing the virtues city. In this way, his use of the term is very different from Ibn Bājja's (as I discuss in the next chapter). We may note that Plato, too, in the *Republic* (Book VI, 497a) uses a botanical metaphor of growing into virtue.

[152] As Demetra Kasimis has noted, the idea that the *Republic's* myth of metals and its attending noble lie (regarding the naturalness of the different classes of society or metals) might not have prescribed as much as expose certain politics by laying "bare the 'artifice' (mēchanē [414b]) by which regimes, including classical Athens, produce membership status as a naturalized categories" ("Plato's Open Secret," 339) As a result, the idea is that the noble lie is better read as revealing– not concealing – that the 'natural' distinctions of an exclusionary citizenship politics are the effects of willful political power" (ibid., 340).

of formation in al-Fārābī's thought. In this context Demetra Kasimis's comment on *physis* is interesting:

> The meanings of physis in classical thought generally militate against a consistent, unitary or prediscursive notion of physis even within a single thinker or text. Plato's dialog presents us with a sense of the multiple and conflicting articulations the 'natural' can take, not simply between two polities but within one. Even when the dialog appears to employ physis to refer to a person's origin or character, it does so in a way that emphasizes the plastic quality of nature – its mutability and its vulnerability to the creative power of mimesis.[153]

Nature on such a reading is quite fluid until more fully determined in culture and politics. Ancestry and blood matter less as people can have different dispositions and, additionally, choose to develop them differently. While certain familiar relations might make it more likely that like and like are born, pure endowment is not enough; the habit one develops is ultimately significant (even if one's original endowment does seriously affect one's likelihood of developing certain habits). While al-Fārābī appears more interested in the originally aristocratic reading of such myths and others, he does share the interest in formation that complicates pure ancestry and emphasizes the mobility of those better suited to rule.[154]

As Melissa Lane has noted in the context of her discussion of natural virtues in Plato's *Republic,* the discussion of the nature of the philosophers (Book VI 474b3-c3) is used in order to

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[153] "Plato's Open Secret," 350.

[154] Such as Hesiod's four races or Herodotus's myth of metals.
Another of al-Fārābī's works, the *Selected Aphorisms* also shows his conviction that proper rulership and the best society requires a treatment of people according to their particular, often limited abilities (though without recourse to *fiṭra* as I discuss further below): "Just as among bodies there are some in which all kinds of health are not possible, by reason of their temperament, or constitution (*khulq*), or custom (*ʿāda*), or special condition, or the employment by which the people gain their livelihood—the case of most bodies (and there are places where the inhabitants are able to gain only a little of the kinds of health), so the condition of souls, because there is in them something which makes it impossible for the soul to acquire the virtues, or most of them, and it cannot realize more than a little. It is not the business of the ideal governor and the first chief to perfect the virtues of one the nature (*ṭabʿ*) and substance of whose soul are such that it does not receive the virtues. His end is simply to bring souls like these as far as possible for them, and to a point of virtue consistent with the advantage of the people of that city" (ET in Dunlop, *The Fuṣūl al-madanī: Aphorisms of the Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 75 (modified); AR also in Dunlop, 168). Like the doctor, the statesman cannot and should not seek to bring people to a perfection beyond what is possible for them. This idea of a natural ranking seems consistent with what I discussed in terms of the *fiṭri* dispositions above, though it does raise questions as to the emphasis on education with respect to the attainment of virtues in *On the Perfect State* and *The Political Regime* (Fauzi M. Najjār has published an updated edition of this work as *Fuṣūl* Muntazaʿa (Beirut: Dār al-Mashri, 1971), which I have consulted).

justify why they rule. Their natural virtues lead them to study philosophy and also make them fit to rule, preventing them from abusing power as they gain the necessary knowledge for rule through philosophy: "the natural philosophers are naturally fitted to rule, and are therefore […] also morally fitted for ruling; they are also those who can become epistemically fitted for ruling, by gaining knowledge through philosophy."[155] The purpose of this section was thus both to show that the best society is that which is ordered by *fiṭar* and as such is able to direct people to their particular attainment of happiness; and also to show in what ways *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī's political thought resembles his use of the concept in his logical works in terms of content and function. An innate capacity, shared but unequal and insufficient, inserting the concepts into his political thought helped explain his visions of rulership, polity, happiness, and above all hierarchy. Put differently, it appears as if *fiṭra,* like *physics,* props up a particular social and political vision: it justifies hierarchies and explains why the elites are most fit to rule.

Unfortunately, we do not know what version of the *Republic* al-Fārābī had access to. Galen's summary is lost but we do know that Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) had some Arabic version since he directly quotes it. This makes it very likely that al-Fārābī knew parts of the *Republic* (especially also considering his quite comprehensive knowledge of it) but we are unable to say much more.[156] It is thus hard to say whether the Arabic he received contained references to *fiṭra*. However, both the fact that those translations were most likely not done by Muslims and the insight we gained from his treatment of his Aristotelian Arabic sources above make it likely that al-Fārābī's use of

[155] Virtue as the Love of Knowledge in Plato's Symposium and Republic," in *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honor of Myles Burnyeat,* ed. Dominic Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 56. However, I should add, in Plato's case, as Lane notes, it is clear that only the naturally suited can actually flourish in philosophy as they alone can become fully virtuous, have knowledge of the good and thus rule others.

[156] On the question of Plato in Arabic see David C. Reisman's recent article "Plato's Republic in Arabic: A Newly Discovered Passage" (*Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2004): 263-300), as well as Rüdiger Arnzen, "Platonische Ideen in der Arabischen Philosophie" (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011). The general trend in recent years has been to highlight how previous generations of scholars underestimated the knowledge Arabic philosophers seemed to have had of Plato.

fiṭra in his political works is a product of his own interpretative activity.[157] This is all to say that it is very likely that al-Fārābī was indeed the first to use *fiṭra* as an innate and varying human endowment as well as faculty relevant to logical, political, and moral hierarchies; and one that would influence the Arabic philosophical tradition after him.[158] However, beyond those rather broad strokes it is indeed difficult to pin down al-Fārābī's vision more exactly. As we have seen so far, particularly the issues of disposition vs. education, cluster of endowments vs. fully formed faculty of distinction, and a broad sharedness vs. distinction make the image more complex. It is to some of those issues that I turn next.

III. Unresolved Questions and Ambiguities

There are several unresolved questions in al-Fārābī's use and conception of *fiṭra* that I will treat in this section. Some of them are more fleshed out than others, given that I have already touched upon several of the issues that follow in the previous discussion.

[157] Additionally, since al-Fārābī was indeed, as we know, the first to go back to the Platonic corpus and write Arabic political philosophy, it seems unlikely that there are others who would have made use of *fiṭra* in a political context.

[158] Another work that discusses the source of naturally occurring moral habits without reference to *fiṭra* is al-Fārābī's *Summary of Plato's Laws.* Thérèse-Anne Druart has published an Arabic edition of the work in *Jawāmīʿ kitāb al-nawāmīs li-Aflāṭūn* (Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales 50 (1998): 109-155) and an English translation is available in Butterworth, *The Political Writings* (Vol.2). The work is a summary of Plato's first nine books, but it is unclear how familiar al-Fārābī actually was with the original text (the Arabic versions available at the time are lost). The main argument of the work is that the purpose of law is to give each their due, according to their capacities (which means that some, such as the very virtuous, do not need any laws at all). Thus, we read that "every nature (*ṭabīʿa*) has an activity particularly suited to it. Hence it is obligatory for the individual and the legislator to be cognizant of this so as to set down each one of the statutes with what is suitable and appropriate to it so that it is not dissipated" (ET in Butterworth, *Alfarabi: The Political Writings* (Vol. 2), 138 (modified); AR in Druart, 129). Al-Fārābī then goes on to say that according to Plato, "in a human being there are natural things (*ṭabīʿiyya*) that are the causes of his moral habits (*ʾakhlāq*) and his actions. Therefore, the lawgiver ought to be intent on these things, straighten them out, and set down laws that straighten those things out. For when they are straightened out, the moral habits and actions will be straightened out as well" (ET in Butterworth, *Alfarabi: The Political Writings* (Vol. 2), 138 (modified); AR in Druart, 130). The notion of different regions making different temperaments (*ṭibāʿ;* AR in Druart, 130 and 131) appears as well but there is, in the entire work, no reference to *fiṭra.*

a) What is humanity's shared or basic *fiṭra*?

While there is a clear hierarchical ordering by *fiṭra* that is relevant to the areas of logic, politics, and ethics, it is not clear what exactly is shared by *fiṭra.* While I showed in the first section that for al-Fārābī every human being has a *fiṭra,* which is what sets it apart from other animals, I am not sure what that *fiṭra* contains or is. For one thing, we saw that al-Fārābī sometimes speak of a 'sound' *fiṭra,* discussing the difference between adults and children as well as that between the sane and the insane. In this vein, it does not seem that a healthy *fiṭra* is either innate or open to all. Further, not all humans have equal access to the first intelligibles, given that not all are equally suited to logical discourse. Similarly, not all reach the same kind of moral perfection (or any at all?) since not all are predisposed to (all) the virtues.[159] That is not to deny what I have argued so far: *fiṭra* is the seat or source of the first intelligibles as well as certain moral and technical dispositions and can, if perfected, serve as a faculty of logical and ethical distinction, as well as political rule. However, despite these very general and rather functionalistic ideas, al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* is a lot clearer about what distinguishes different groups and individuals than what unites them. Maybe what unites all is the *potential* for virtues and certain arts as well as the capacity to reason and make ethical distinctions; all of which would set the human animal apart from other creatures. However, al-Fārābī never explicitly narrows it down to the lowest common denominator; his interest appears rather to be in explaining certain inequalities and divergences.

b) How are we to differentiate *fiṭra* from *ṭabʿ* and/or *ṭabīʿā*

While my sense is that the concept of the *fiṭra* is predominantly reserved for the human animal, it is not clear to me how exactly al-Fārābī differentiates between *ṭabʿ* and/or *ṭabīʿā* and

[159] And, as we saw, the same is true in the case of political leadership.

fiṭra. Thus a third work of political philosophy, *Selected Aphorisms*[160] makes very similar arguments regarding human dispositions towards certain virtues by nature, the insufficiency of those virtues, as well as the political relevance of such differing disposition; but it does so without any reference to *fiṭra*. [161] The ninth *faṣl* argues that "it is not possible that the human being is created (*yufṭar*) from the beginning by nature (*bi-l-tab'*) with a virtue (*faḍīla*) or a defect (*naqiṣa*), just as it is not possible that the human being is created (*yufṭar*) by nature (*bi-l-tab'*) a weaver or a writer."[162] While insufficient, like *fiṭra,* to cause natural virtues, *ṭabʿ* provides the dispositions that make acquiring certain virtues easier:

> But it is possible that [the human being] by nature (*bi-l-tab'*) is disposed to the conditions (*aḥwāl*) of a virtue (*faḍīla*) or a vice (*raḍīla*), by those actions being easier for him than other actions, just as it is possible that he is by nature (*bi-l-tab'*) disposed to the actions of writing or another art by these actions being easier for him than other actions.[163]

How is this description different from what we have seen above with respect to *fiṭra*: disposition by nature towards certain virtues or vices and the ease that follows from such dispositions? This is particularly puzzling since al-Fārābī uses *yufṭar* to speak of the human creation. The overlap continues in the more explicitly political aphorisms as al-Fārābī speaks of the one disposed 'by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*)' towards either the virtues or logic. Here he explicitly mentions the first principles or intelligibles, usually associated with *fiṭra* (speaking of knowledge "that the whole is

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[160] Referenes again are to the English and Arabic text published by Dunlop in *Fuṣūl al-madanī: Aphorisms of the Statesman.*

[161] A noteworthy observation is that unlike *On the Perfect State* and *The Political Regime,* the *Aphorisms* are explicit about the need of the virtuous to emigrate. While Dunlop speculates that the work might thus reflect al-Fārābī's own circumstances around 948/9, the theme makes it a good candidate for inspiring Ibn Bājja's *Taḍbīr* (See *faṣl* 88 on the obligation for the virtuous man to emigrate).

[162] ET in Dunlop (1961), 31 (modified); AR also in Dunlop, 109.

[163] Ibid.

Similarly, the distinction from *ṭabīʿa* neither seems clear to me as al-Fārābī further elaborates: "This natural disposition (*al-istiʿadād al-ṭabīʿiyyi*) is not called a virtue, just as the natural disposition (*al-istiʿadād al-ṭabīʿiyyi*) towards the actions of weaving are not called weaving. But when a natural disposition is towards the actions of a virtue and those actions are repeated, become habitual and are established by habit (*ʿāda*), till there appears in the soul a disposition (*ḥīʾa*) from which those two types of actions proceed. The skilled (*mutamakkina*) disposition (*ḥīʾa*) from the habit (*ʿāda*) is called a virtue (*faḍīla*). The natural disposition (*al- ḥīʾa al-ṭabīʿiyyi*) is called neither a virtue nor a vice, even if there proceed from it actions of only one of the types [i.e. only virtues or vices]. The nature (*ṭabīʿia*) has no name […]. For it is for that which is by habit (*ʿāda*) that the human being is praised or blamed" (ibid.).

greater than the part"[164]). As he repeats in the next section, these are the "first principles in which is certainty and which occur known to the intellect by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*)."[165] Given the parallel descriptions and functions, I am not sure *fiṭra* for al-Fārābī is clearly distinct from either *ṭabʿ* or *ṭabīʿa*.[166] Maybe the issue is one of audience or context; but beyond the fact that *fiṭra* appears less often and thus seems more particular than either *ṭabʿ* or *ṭabīʿa,* I am not certain that they are not synonymous.

c) Is *fiṭra* merely a tool or does it contain certain (particularly ethical) principles?

Neither does al-Fārābī clarify what exactly is contained in the *fiṭra*. With respect to the issue of the first intelligibles or principles of logic, Davidson has pointed out that there is a tension in al-Farābī's conception of their origin.[167] While in most writings, they seem to stem from the active intellect[168] and are only received *through* the *fiṭra,* explaining the different suitabilities of

[164] ET in Dunlop (1961), 42; AR also in Dunlop, 125.
[165] Ibid. The other occurrence of the root *f-ṭ-r* in the work is another (double) use of *yufṭar/fuṭir* (created) in *faṣl* 47 (AR in Dunlop, 133), in parallel to *faṣl* 9.
[166] *Faṣl* 92 does make use of *fiṭra;* but according to Dunlop it is most likely inauthentic (and others seem to follow this judgment). This seems credible to me, especially given its quite unfamiliar language as well as a unique introduction ("section by ʾAbū Naṣr): "No man is apt to exist endowed (*maflūr*) from the first with perfection, so that there is no discrepancy in him, and that all his actions and way of life and ethical qualities are in accord with justice and equity, not turning aside to any extreme or predominance of one contrary over another. That is because the *fiṭra* is made up of opposites which the combination forces together, and if its natural characteristics were isolated and equalized there would be no harmony, since they are so dissimilar and so discrepant and different, and, in spite of their forced cohesion, a slighter or more considerable tension may easily cause lack of equilibrium in the constitution. Any *fiṭra* where the tension between the elements is slight, is nearer to equilibrium, and *vice versa,* so that the natural temper depends on equal proportions of antagonism and equilibrium in the antagonism and equilibrium of the natures (*ṭibāʾ*)" (ET in Dunlop (1961)*,* 76 (modified); AR also in Dunlop, 169).
[167] Griffel, tracing Vallat's argument, has also noted that tension: "strictly speaking *fiṭra* is the disposition or the capacity to receive the first intelligibles. In a broader sense, however, the ensemble of the first intelligibles is also called *fiṭra*" ("Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fiṭra*)," 11).
[168]As Janos notes, the active intellect is "the tenth intellect of al-Fārābī's cosmology. It is a separate, immaterial being that is always in actuality and whose relation to human thought is like that of the sun to human vision. Through its assistance, the human mind can abstract forms from their material substrates and apprehend them as intelligibles. Al-Fārābī's conception of the Agent Intellect betrays a particular interpretation of Aristotle's *On the soul* III.5 informed by the commentators, although the precise sources and textual genealogy underlying the Arabic philosophers' theory of the Agent Intellect are still the objects of research" ("al-Fārābī").

people for logic, some works seem to envisage these principles themselves as being inborn (which raises the question of why some people can develop or access them more fully; or whether they are inborn unequally).[169] On the latter reading, Davidson points to the *Risāla fī'la-ʿaql,* where he sees the original human intellect no longer conceived as a disposition but rather as a substance that has certain qualities of unknown origin.[170] More pervasive, however, is the view that the active intellect provides the basic principles of human reasoning.[171] While Davidson acknowledges slightly differing accounts regarding the details of this process of emanation from the active to the human intellect (i.e. how much knowledge is provided at the outset of human existence and to whom in what measure), the basic idea, he argues, is that "man, through his own effort, constructs a body of science on the foundation furnished by the active intellect."[172] Humans thus are both called to perfect themselves and to do so on the basis of an unequally endowed ability to receive the first principles.[173] Overall, both theories are compatible, practically speaking. For whether the

[169] Davidson sees the origin of this divergence in Farābī's different occasions and teaching locales (*Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect,* 73).

[170] See also Ibrahim Al-ʿAti, *Al-Insān fī falsafa al-Fārābī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nubūgh, 1998), 149f on the impression that Farābī at times does seem to think that it is *by* the *fiṭra* that we know directly the first things. Philippe Vallat also seems to think that the *fiṭra* is identical with the first principles.

[171] Thus, Davidson notes with references to both *On the Perfect State* and *The Political Regime*: "When the emission from the active intellect which is analogous to light acts upon the human material intellect, or rational faculty, and upon the sense perceptions stored in the imaginative faculty, those sense perceptions undergo a change and become 'intelligible thoughts in the rational faculty.' The product is 'the first intelligible' thoughts common to all men, such as [the principles] that the whole is greater than the part, and that magnitudes equal to a single thing are equal to one another" (*Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 51). Similarly, Griffel writes (citing from *The Political Regime*) that *fiṭra* "is the ability—or the talent—to receive the first intelligibles. That is a talent that all, or at least most humans have. Those people whose original dispositions are sound (*salīma*)—for al-Farabi this group excludes dull-witted and insane people—have one common original disposition (*fiṭra mushtaraka)* that 'makes them ready for the reception of the intelligibles, which are common to all humans who through them pursue the affairs and perform the actions that they have in common'" ("Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fiṭra*), 9f).

[172] *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 53.

[173] Davidson elaborates: "the active intellect does not complete the perfection of the human intellect by itself. It rather initiates the development of the human intellect and at subsequent stages contributes further necessary knowledge. […] Men differ in their inborn ability 'to receive' the common first intelligible thoughts, ranging from those who are unable to receive any to those of sound innate ability who can receive all. Through the common intelligible thoughts that sound men do receive, they 'strive toward matters *[umur]* and acts common to' mankind—presumably toward universal theoretical and ethical, or practical, knowledge. Not only does the active intellect provide the initial 'common' intelligible thoughts. It subsequently provides specialized thoughts as well. Certain men have 'special' innate abilities to receive 'special' intelligible thoughts, 'whereby they strive' toward one or another 'genus' of knowledge, and those special intelligible thoughts, which are the principles of the several sciences, likewise come

first principles are in fact innate or come at some early time from the active intellect does not affect the reality of two things al-Fārābī emphasizes: the differing receptivity to certain kinds of discourses among people and thus their inherent inequality; as well as the need for further education and development for all people, even the most gifted. Farābī clearly does not believe that all human equally receive or access, as well, make use of and develop the first principles and yet equally appears to affirm the importance of further formation beyond what is immediately given or available.[174] In either case, it is not entirely clear whether the basic principles of logic are accessed through or contained in the *fiṭra.*

A related, but more specific issue concerns the question of whether ethical principles are contained in the *fiṭra.* On the most general level, al-Fārābī explicitly argues in his *Harmonization between the Opinions of Plato and Aristotle* (*Kitāb al-jamʿ bayna raʾyay al-ḥakīmayn Aflāṭūn al-ilāhī wa Arisṭūṭālīs*)[175] that there is no natural moral character or *ʾakhlāq* and that all virtues are indeed changeable and acquired.[176] While such an argument in favor of moral development does not explicitly address the question of inborn ethical principles, it seems to speak against it. Stating

from the active intellect. Alfarabi elaborates with distinctions regarding the number of thoughts different men are able to receive in each 'genus,' the differing innate abilities men have for applying the principles of science, variations in the rapidity with which men draw inferences from the principles provided them, and variations in their ability to teach others" (*Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 52)

[174] See also Deborah Black, "Knowledge (*ʿilm*) and Certitude (*yaqīn*) in al-Fārābī's Epistemology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 16 (2006): 11-45. Druart also notes that although "the agent intellect bestows the first intelligibles through emanation it does not follow that all human beings receive these intelligibles. For al-Fārābī human beings are not all endowed with the same intellectual capacities and with the same dispositions. So some by nature do not receive any of the first intelligibles; some receive them but not as they really are—this is the case of the lunactics--; and some receive them as they really are. These last are the only happy people whose native human nature is sound and they alone may obtain happiness" (Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles," *Documenti et Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* VIII (1997): 422).

[175] References are to the Arabic and French edition published by Fauzi Najjār and Dominique Mallet in *L'Harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d'Aristote* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1999). The English translations are mine. There has been serious doubt in recent years as to the authenticity of the work (see Joep Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic Practice* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill 1994)*,* 30–9; and Marwan Rashed, "On the Authorship of the Treatise *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages* Attributed to al-Fārābī," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (2009): 43–82). However, as Chaim Meir Neria recently noted, there is still enough reason to see the work as his ("Al-Fārābī's Lost Commentary on the Ethics. New Textual Evidence," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (2013): 74).

[176] Cf. Najjar and Mallet, *L'Harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d'Aristote*, 108-117.

what might be perceived as a deep disagreement between the two towering figures, al-Fārābī argues that Aristotle's position, that virtues are acquired and not 'by nature' (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*), and Plato's, that nature (*ṭabʿ*) trumps custom (*ʿāda*) since something that has become part of one's character (*khulq*) is difficult to get rid of, can indeed be harmonized. The solution is that when Aristotle speaks about things that are natural, he means only those of the most general kind (*qawānīn*), and the fact of the matter is rather that all character traits are acquired and thus changeable, even if connected to difficulty. Indeed, it would be wrong to think that any character traits are impossible to change. [177]

What complicates this picture is that in places, Fārābī seems to affirm that there are natural virtues. Thus in section 16 of his commentary on the *Categories,* we read of the "natural sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ṭabīʿiyya*) upon which man is created (*yufṭar*), such as knowledge of the first premises (*al-muqawwimāt al-ʾawwal)* and the virtues (*akhlāq*) which come to man by the *fiṭra* and also to many of the animals and also the natural crafts (*al-ṣināʿāt al-ṭabīʿiyya*) which may exist in many other animals, like weaving in some kinds of spiders."[178] The idea that knowledge 'of the virtues' is by *fiṭra* at first glance appears strange.[179] However, both the comparison to the 'morals' of animals and their arts, shared by human and non-human animals and the fact that this occurs not in the section on the natural powers but rather in a discussion of habituation is significant. I think

[177] "But it is clear that every character trait (*khulq*), if we consider it generally, can be considered as movable and changeable, even if it is connected to difficulty. And none of the character traits (*ʾakhlāq*) is unable to be changed or moved. For verily, the child whose soul has no power (*quwwa*) yet, does not have any character traits (*ʾakhlāq*) by action or knowledge or acquisition (*qunyāt*). Everything is a power (*quwwa*) at this point. And the power is to accept a thing or its opposite. But [once he has] accepted one of the two opposites it is not possible to change from one of them to acquiring the other […]. So, if things are like this, then no character traits (*ʾakhlāq*), if considered generally, are by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) so that no change or shift is possible" (Najjar and Mallet, *L'Harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d'Aristote*, 111f).

[178] ET in Dunlop, *Al-Fārābī's Paraphrase of the* Categories, 191; AR also in Dunlop, 176.

[179] On the existence of natural ethical truths in al-Fārābī see also Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court: Cultural Life under al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād* (New York: Routledge), 69. Al-ʿAti (*Al-Insān fī falsafa al- Fārābī*), like many others, disagrees with this idea, emphasizing (as I have) that ethical knowledge is acquired. While certain actions are easier for some people than others, Farābī does not believe in natural virtues.

the sense here is one of a very basic disposition for goodness or virtue, as argued above, and one to be developed by habituation; meaning an appreciation of virtue as such. This seems particularly likely given the use of the term 'premises' (*muqawwimāt*) rather than the usual 'intelligibles' and the fact that in a line above al-Fārābī mentions that morality or a virtuous character (*akhlāq*) is a result of the will (*ʾirāda*).[180] As I mentioned above with respect to al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* in his account of the *Categories,* the term seems to denote here the particular form of the human being, which sets it apart from other animals. However, it also describes what humans and other animals share: natural dispositions for certain traits and arts.[181] While thus allowing for certain dispositions, including one towards the value of moral perfection, actual moral perfection is the result of the will and not naturally available to humans or contained in their *fiṭra.*[182]

Another passage, this time from *On the Perfect State,* raises the question of the ethical significance of *fiṭra* more sharply (though, admittedly and importantly, without explicitly using the term *fiṭra*). Writing on reason in chapter 13 of *On the Perfect State,* al-Fārābī argues that "the human intellect (*ʿaql*), which arises in humans by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) from the beginning is a disposition (*hīʾa*) in matter prepared to receive the imprints (*rusūm*) of the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*)."[183] The human being in fact receives the intelligibles from the active intellect, which

[180] Cf. AR in Dunlop, *Al-Fārābī's Paraphrase of the* Categories, 176.
[181] Maybe it has in fact another level of the double-character I described above: there is a broad *fiṭra* all creation shares (i.e. for preservation and continuation of the species), then there is a particular, rational disposition only humans have, which again is only fully functioning in some (leading to the distinction we saw above between a broadly shared human *fiṭra* and the excellence of some in logic, politics, and ethics).
[182] This seems in line with what Melissa Lane has described as the natural virtues that dispose one to philosophy but need to be perfected, leading to the full acquisition of virtue through knowledge: "natural virtues are preconditions for the acquisition of knowledge-based virtues because only someone who is naturally abstemious as result of their love for philosophy could go on to develop the panoply of full virtues. Without the right natural predisposition, they would sooner or later become distracted from the correct path by bodily desires which were not yet controlled by governing knowledge. Further, natural virtues remain part of the psychological make-up of those who go on to develop full virtues. This plays a crucial role in the overall argument of the *Republic,* as the natural virtues of those with philosophical natures explain why the same people who are suited to do philosophy are also morally suited to rule" ("Virtue as the Love of Knowledge in Plato's Symposium and Republic," 45f). As natural virtues are not full virtues, they are both necessary and insufficient for the philosopher.
[183] ET in Walzer, *Alfarabi on the Perfect State,* 199 (modified); AR also in Walzer, 198.

works like a sun, casting light on the rational faculty.[184] These are the "first intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwaI)* which are shared (*mushtaraka*) by all people."[185] Not surprisingly, these shared intelligibles include such things as "the whole is bigger than the part."[186] Al-Fārābī argues that these 'shared first intelligibles' are of three kinds (*aṣnāf*): "one kind (*ṣinaf*) is the beginnings (*ʾawāʾil*) of productive skills, another kind are the beginnings through which one becomes aware of the good (*jamīl*) and evil (*qabīḥ*) in human actions, and the kind of beginnings used to know things such as the heavens or the first cause."[187] However, al-Fārābī clearly does not mean full ethical knowledge here, given the language of 'beginnings.' Additionally, he immediately notes that "when these intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) become present in man, careful examination, deliberation, practical thought and a desire to find out things arise in him by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*)."[188] In line with what we saw above with respect to the development of *fiṭra,* there is a beginning here (rather than a perfection): "the attainment of the first intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwal*) in man is his first completion (*istikmāl*). And these intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) are brought about to him only to bring about his ultimate completion, which is happiness."[189] There is no question that the attainment of perfection occurs through habituating virtues and proper ordering of will.[190]

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[184] Cf. ET in Walzer, *Alfarabi on the Perfect State,* 200.
[185] ET in Walzer, 203 (modified); AR also in Walzer, 202.
[186] Ibid. This reference encourages me to refer to this passage for the purpose of this inquiry into *fiṭra.*
[187] ET in Walzer, 205 (modified); AR also in Walzer, 204. It is significant that unlike in many other places, al-Fārābī here explains the content of the intelligibles beyond the well-known mathematical dictum. Maybe we must be prepared to allow that when he speaks of these intelligibles in other places (and explicitly in the context of *fiṭra* then), he also means to gesture towards basic ethical principles.
[188] ET in Walzer, 205 (modified); AR also in Walzer, 204.
[189] Ibid.
[190] ET in Walzer, 209 (modified); AR also in Walzer, 208. That human natural endowments are insufficient for human flourishing al-Fārābī also mentions in the context of describing the inhabitants of the failing cities later on in *On the Perfect State.* He describes their souls as imperfect (*ghayr mustakmila*) "since no trace of truth whatsoever except the first intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ʾawwal*) has been imprinted on them" (ET in Walzer, 270/271). While seemingly shared by these general inhabitants of the failing city, the first intelligibles (that as I have shown are located in the *fiṭra*) are what makes the souls of these people insufficient (the *Book on the Attainment of Happiness* also affirms natural dispositions are not sufficient. While it is true that "man moves first in the direction in which it is easier for him to move" (ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy*, 69 (modified); AR in al-Jaʿfar, 7f), such a disposition is not a full characteristic: while someone might be created (*mafṭūran*) so that he is prone to courage, he still needs to "repeat this several times before this becomes a voluntary habit (*al-malaka al-ʾirādiyya*). Before he [merely] possessed

So how are we to envisage the ethical relevance of *fiṭra*? According to Thérèse-Anne Druart, what appears to be a tension between the affirmation of the need for moral formation and the very scarce mention of ethical precepts as innate has to do with two things: al-Fārābī's different senses of 'ethics,' or what I have described above as the difference between moral formation and ethical knowledge; and varying degrees of agreement with Aristotle. Regarding the first, Druart points out that we must indeed conceive of 'ethics' in three senses for al-Fārābī: "the rhetorical as presented through religion, the dialectical required at the beginning of philosophical education, and the demonstrative or scientific which is reached at the end of philosophical training."[191] Druart notes the unusualness of such a belief in a demonstrative ethical science available to the elites.[192] However, the scientific principles basic to such a science, she affirms, ought to be further determined "by practical wisdom arising from experience and the particular cultural context."[193] That al-Fārābī does not in all places consistently confirm his belief in such a science she explains by arguing that in some works (such as *On the Intellect*), al-Fārābī sided with Aristotle's belief that ethics is merely the result of common or widespread opinion and its principles are not self-evident (hence preventing it from being a demonstrative science). Later works, including *On the Perfect State,* show that (at least the late) al-Fārābī thought of one branch of ethics as a demonstrative science, available for those able to participate in demonstration more generally. The difference between the two convictions is to be explained either by a change in al-Fārābī's mind,

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the corresponding, natural first habit (*al-malaka al-ʾawwali al-shabīḥa bihadhihi ṭabīʿiyya*)" (ET in Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy*, 69; AR in al-Jaʿfar, 77).

[191] "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles," 403.

[192] Unusual both in the context of Aristotelian as well as Islamic thought as it would be rejected by thinkers such as Ibn Sīnā or al-Ghāzālī. To confirm his belief in such a demonstrative science of ethics it would have been helpful had al-Fārābī, or any of his intellectual heirs for that matter, developed such a science more fully or explicitly. Druart, at least, sees precedence for such a belief in other Aristotelian commentators such as Alexander of Aphrodisias.

[193] "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles," 423. Such a very basic science, whose precepts are provided to some by *fiṭra,* would then parallel the availability of logical first principles available in the same fashion.

or earlier mere lip service to the great master.[194] Overall, Druart sees al-Fārābī balance universals rooted in what she calls 'emanationist metaphysics' from the active intellect and the realities of embodied, particular, differing, and above all social beings.

> Al-Fārābī's move beyond Aristotle allows him scope for grounding ethics and for making of at least part of ethics a demonstrative science. His approach gives an account of both the universality of ethical concerns and the universal acknowledgement that every human being of sound mind is amoral agent and should be one, as well as an account of what at times is a wide diversity of moral codes.[195]

According to Druart, there are not only different kinds of ethics for the different kinds of people, but above all a very basic but in its origin demonstrative, science of ethics open to the elites.[196]

While I am tempted to agree with the broad strokes of this argument, I want to emphasize that we do not have sufficient proof for al-Fārābī's commitment to the innateness of ethical principles or their content.[197] It seems very clear throughout his writings that for al-Fārābī, norms for conduct (or ethics) are tailored to one's ability to participate in certain discourses. Particularly those of lesser ability are to be guided through the norms of religion and their aim is character development within their own limits. Those of exceptional *fiṭra* and those who have been able to perfect themselves to the highest degree as philosophers might be able by means of reason to discover some very basic ethical and participate in an ethical science only open to the elites.[198]

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[194] Cf. "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles," 405

[195] Ibid., 423.

[196] I will return to the question of a demonstrative science of ethics in chapter 6.

[197] The idea that some ethical truths might appear natural al-Fārābī explicitly dispels in the second section of his *Introductory Sections on Logic.* Having divided knowledge into different categories, he notes that while a basic sense of what counts as good and evil may be known without demonstration, it is not part of the first intelligibles. Rather, convictions such as 'kindness and gratitude are good' are accepted opinions widespread among the educated (*mashhūrāt*). Like certain skills handed down among some guild (e.g. doctors), such opinions are known but not in fact part of the first intelligibles (ET in Dunlop, *Fusul tashtamilu,* 276; AR also in Dunlop, 267). This seems to overlap with what we saw in the discussion of seemingly natural knowledge in the work on harmonizing Platonic and Aristotelian views. The notion that the well-ordered *fiṭra* can distinguish the good (*jamīl*) from the reprehensible (*qabīḥ*) is also expressed in the section on logic in the *Enumeration of the Sciences* (AR in Amīn, *ʾIḥsāʾ al-ʿulūm*, 63).

[198] Druart cites al-Fārābī mentioning in his *Reminder to the Way of Happiness* that 'honoring one's parents is beautiful' or that 'justice is beautiful' ("Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles," 412). However, she herself acknowledges that these are both very general principles and not claimed to be 'inborn' (or part of a proper science) but rather presented as discoverable independent of religion.

Nevertheless, particular and contingent determinations dominate once the ethical moves from its most theoretical to its practical implications.[199] The ability to participate in a such a science and make reasonable distinctions between the morally desirable and reprehensible is the outcome of a process of formation and the fruit of a perfected *fiṭra*. However, I want to raise questions regarding Druart's inborn ethical principles: I am not sure we can truly find such principles (which are inborn (*fiṭri*) like those of logic) nor really say anything about their content in those writings by al-Fārābī I have examined so far.[200] As I hope to have shown throughout this chapter (and particularly with respect to the two passages from the *Categories* and *On the Perfect* State), al-Fārābī simply does not provide enough information regarding such principles. At most, he hints at them in a very general manner.

I would be more comfortable to say the following regarding al-Fārābī's views on the matter: it is first of all of great importance to him to argue that while there are natural dispositions, which are unevenly spread across humanity, there is no ethical knowledge we can meaningfully describe as inborn (just as there are no natural virtues or naturally virtuous people). Full virtues, just like the ability to recognize a particular action or good as morally desirable in a particular context, are the result of a fully formed character that has both favorable dispositions and has enjoyed rigorous training. However, it is also important to acknowledge that in some places al-Fārābī seems to hint that humans have an inborn appreciation of goodness or virtue, striving for a

[199] Druart leaves no doubt that the weight of this science of ethics falls on particular, contextual developments (allowing al-Fārābī to hold together the universality of humans as moral agents and the particularity of their interpretations of what such a moral agent might look like) (cf. "Al-Farabi, Ethics, and First Intelligibles," 423).
[200] Druart rests her case on the passage in *On the Perfect State* quoted above. But I am hesitant to follow such an analysis given the scarcity of the reference and a general lack of information regarding the supposed ethical precepts. Additionally, she appeals to al-Fārābī's defense of human free will in his commentary on Aristlte's *De Interpretatione* (Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's* De Interpretatione, 78f). Here al-Fārābī defends those things known through our *fiṭra* against the opinions of theologians and others and since, according to Druart such a defense could not be necessary for mathematical principles, he must be assuming ethical ones. I am not so sure, however, given that he never once mentions such ethical principles in the text.

basic perfection of their selves (according to their natural dispositions). While ethical knowledge is thus not inborn for al-Fārābī, certain—very basic—principles might be themselves in (or at least are accessed through) the *fiṭra*. Yet the nature of such principles is left (seemingly quite intentionally and consistently) unclear. On such a reading, *fiṭra* might most accurately be described as a form of natural law or created orientation that others have argued for in Thomas Aquinas.[201] However, here I cannot stress enough two important facets of al-Fārābī's conception of *fiṭra* I have stressed throughout: its underdetermination and its variability. Whether or not some (most general) principles are indeed naturally available to us, moral agents are not born but formed and not everyone has the disposition nor the education to *become* such fully formed agent.[202] Such a reading seems most in line with al-Fārābī's conception of the education of philosophers more broadly, who, despite potentially being more disposed towards/ able to access logic, must undergo rigorous training.

However, as I just mentioned in my engagement with Druart, while I agree that there are multiple senses of 'ethics' present in al-Fārābī (one in terms of character formation, moving from

[201] See for example John Bowlin's *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). He argues that while Thomas believes in a common good we all will, the nature of that good is not determined. Natural law on his reading is a starting point that directs us towards an end, providing the human form with the finality that is willed by its creator.

[202] Conceived in this way, *fiṭra*'s ethical dimension appears to resemble what Anthony Hatzistavrou has argued for in the case of Plato's use of *physis.* Both terms describe (a) a cluster of a particular person's natural capacities which are to be developed by a process of education" and "(b) the developed personality of a particular person, i.e. basic character-traits this person has acquired after a process of education" ("Happiness and the Nature of the Philosopher-Kings," in *New Essays on Plato,* ed. Fritz-Gregor Herrmann (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 95). Plato, for Hatzistavrou, thus uses physis to make an "implicit distinction between φύσις as a particular person's natural abilities and φύσις as a particular person's developed personality" (ibid., 106). In Farābī's case we can say that those of exceptional *fiṭar* are those who by nature have exceptional capacities. While they share certain human capacities and dispositions with other humans, they are uniquely disposed and capable of certain excellences. This is not to say that such people do not have to develop these capacities through education, yet they are uniquely disposed towards certain excellences. Once such people have developed their natural capacities, they are left with a *fiṭra* that allows them to excel morally, politically, and logically (As Hatzistavrou notes, in the *Republic* Plato assumes that humans "differ substantially in our nature and that for this reason each one of us can perform different tasks (370a7–b2). It is on the basis of our natural individual differences that he commends his principle of division of labour which becomes the kernel of his account of political justice" ("Happiness and the Nature of the Philosopher-Kings," 106). As in Plato's case, these two senses of *fiṭra* are compatible as both the endowed capabilities and the training are necessary for perfection.

an 'original' to a developed *fiṭra,* and a scientific knowledge or wisdom accessible to the elites), I am hesitant to claim that either is really innate (or truly 'demonstrative'). Maybe because we lack the relevant writings (such as al-Fārābī's commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics*) but I do believe it curious that among the many mentions of the first principles in other texts, it is hard to find any (convincingly) ethical ones. Additionally, al-Fārābī continuously affirms that there are no natural virtues but only dispositions for virtues. Thus, I am tempted to say that—beyond the most general principles—a 'demonstrative' ethical science is not *fiṭri* but practically worked out by those most suited and trained for such a task.[203] While I have tried to show that there is some room for uncertainty regarding the potential ethical content of the *fiṭra*, I want to stress two things: when al-Fārābī does mention the first intelligibles contained in or accessed through the *fiṭra*, they are described overwhelmingly as logical/mathematical;[204] and when he discusses the ability to make ethical decisions and be fully virtuous, he stresses the acquired nature of both repeatedly.

d) How determinative is the original *fiṭra* and how much can habituation affect it?

A question that repeatedly has come up in al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra,* particularly when it comes to the question of morality, concerns his commitment to both inborn dispositions (or maybe talent) and the promise and importance of, and indeed *necessity* for, formation.[205] As Peter

[203] I do concede, however, that the absence of such inborn ethical principles might not only have to do with a particularly unlucky loss of texts but also the possibility of threat as Druart repeatedly notes (i.e. al-Fārābī knew his views would be judged controversial on this). However, for now I see it more likely to go with the route that involves the least amount of speculation.

[204] Though, as I mentioned before, he is not particularly detailed in his description; and, as we saw, could be at times said to hint at the relevance of the first principles to a science of ethics.

[205] Al-Fārābī addresses the question of the power of *fiṭra* also in his *Philosophy of Aristotle* (*Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*). Here he notes that it is true, there are "necessary cognitions that man grew up with and they were created (*fuṭirat*) with him and come to him by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) in addition to what is apprehended by the senses" (AR in Mahdi, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, 62). However, this knowledge is also not enough for all of the human beings' needs and how to fulfill them. "All of this is because he is not directed to it by *fiṭra"* (ibid., my translation).

Adamson has pointed out, this emphasis on the necessity and promises of education does not completely neutralize the fact that "nature endows individual humans with unequal talents."[206] As a result, no "development in the linguistic arts and sciences can blur the innate differences in natural capacities among humans with regard to all aspects of human life."[207] He thus "does not shy away from proclaiming the absolute superiority of philosophy. Nor is he squeamish about proclaiming the inferiority of the multitude."[208] And Joshua Parens describes Fārābī's world as one "filled with rank and hierarchy."[209] As we could see above, those who are talented but do not make use of their natural dispositions could end up worse than those who are less naturally disposed but willing to work towards their perfection.[210] However, there are clearly limits to such

[206] "Knowledge of Universals and Particulars in the Baghdad School," *Documenti e Studi sull Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* XVIII (2007): 163.
[207] Ibid. 164.
[208] Ibid, 166.
[209] *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religion. Introducing Alfarabi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006) 1. NB: A lot hangs on whether the ranks of excellences are correlated with membership in existing social classes. If so, the hierarchies are politically conservative in tendency. If not, the hierarchies tend to undercut the authority of the existing ruling class. I am not sure what Fārābī really thinks on this; I am tempted to go with the first but I do not think I have enough evidence either way since his account is quite abstract and purely focused on those intellectually considered elites vs. those that represent the masses.
[210] Al-Fārābī's *Reminder to the Way of Happiness* (*Kitāb al-tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda,* AR in *Rasāʾil al-Fārābī* (Hyderabad, 1936)) makes the point about the relation between natural dispositions and the role of formation most clearly. It is interesting to note that this is one of al-Fārābī's works translated early into Medieval Latin (we have a manuscript from the 12th century, by Gerard de Cremone (d. 1187) (cf. H. Salman, "Le *Liber exercitationis ad viam felicitates* d'Alfarabi," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiéval* 12 (1940): 33-48). Be that as it may, al-Fārābī most likely envisaged the work as heading his version of the *Isagoge* as well as the *Categories*). Here we read that " every person is created (*maftūr*) from the beginnings of his existence with a power (*quwwa*) through which his actions and the accidents of his soul, and his discernment (*tamyīz*) are as they should be and it is through this very power that these three [actions, accidents, discernment] are not as they should be. It is through this power that he performs good (*jamīla*) actions, and it is through this same power that he performs reprehensible actions (*qabīḥa*)" (AR in *Kitāb al-tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda,* 5f (my translation)). Based on what we have seen, this 'power' from creation is the *fiṭra*, differentiated again from any acquired habits. However, this passage also underlines the role *fitra* plays in ethical decisions (presumably, as I argued above, once it has been perfected). Yet, as previously, there is no doubt that "all moral characteristics (*akhlāq*), the good (*jamīl*) and the reprehensible (*qabīḥ*), are acquired" (ibid., 7 (my translation)). This acquisition, as seen before, is not stable or unchanging: for "whenever a person does not have a disposition (*khulq*) actually present, he can obtain it for himself, and whenever he finds that he has a given disposition, whether good (*jamīl*) or reprehensible (*qabīḥ*), with respect to a given thing, he can convey himself by means of his will (*ʾirāda*) to the opposite of that disposition (*khulq*)" (ibid.). This, as al-Fārābī explains, is done by habituation, which is a process of repetition (cf. ibid.). In the description of this process, we get another glimpse of what is by now familiar: the interplay of different natural dispositions, which are not sufficient (because of imperfection) but which are also the source of different human talents: "before attaining proficiency in writing, excellence is by the power (*quwwa*) upon which he was created (*fuṭira*), whereas afterwards excellence is by the skill. In the same way, the good (*jamīl*) action is possible for the human being before obtaining the good disposition (*khulq*), by the power (*quwwa*)

education. Al-Fārābī clearly also believes in natural elites, who despite their need for further formation, are uniquely suited to logic as well as political and moral leadership. Related to what I discussed above, the question is thus: what can people hope for? Are those natural elites simply given, maybe even divinely ordained (as the use of *fiṭra* might point to) and thus to be accepted; and how is one to know one's own ceiling or that of those under one's care on such a scheme? Finally, if, as we saw above, formation through habituation is beneficial and indeed crucial for one's perfection, how are we to imagine the outcome of such perfection with regard to the status of the original *fiṭra*? In other words, does a person's *fiṭra* change as they labor towards their own perfection? This seems to be implied given the idea that a well-formed *fiṭra* becomes the seat (among those who can) of a reliable source of ethical judgments. If that is the case, do we have to imagine a kind of first, or original *fiṭra* as well as a second, more perfected one (in line with what I said above with respect to Platonic *physis*)?

IV. The Historical and Methodological Significance of al-Fārābī's Use of *Fiṭra*

Having discussed the uses and ambiguities of *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī, I want to finally turn to the question of how original his use of the term might be. It is generally assumed that al-Fārābī was no native speaker of Arabic and that he also did not know Greek. Instead, he relied on Arabic

upon which he was created (*fuṭira*), whereas afterwards obtaining [the good action] is because of the action" (*Kitāb al-tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda,* 8 (my translation)).In this theory, pre-habituated dispositions and the habituated good things are the same: "When these actions that come from the dispositions are present, they are the very same actions that, as long as the person has habitually performed them before obtaining the dispositions, the dispositions will present" (ibid.). I am not entirely sure whether it is implied here that some people, theoretically, are able to commit good actions without habituation through volition. Everything we have seen so far, including in this treatise, speaks against it, though he does here too go into the different kinds of people based on certain inherited capacities (cf. ibid., 16f), as well as the role of philosophy to aid the habituation of proper moral characteristics and thus in bringing about happiness (cf. ibid., 21).

translations from the Greek as well as intermediate Syriac.[211] Additionally, both his main teachers and the sources of his Arabic Aristotle were Christian: [212] the above mentioned ʾAbū Bishr ibn Yūnus, who translated the *Posterior Analytics* into Arabic,[213] and Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn (d.910), who translated the *Categories*.[214] As we saw above, neither of those sources (i.e. the Arabic of the *Categories* and the *Posterior* Analytics), in the form al-Fārābī was most likely familiar with, contained references to *fiṭra.* However, in al-Fārābī's treatment of both of these works the term plays an important role. This appears, at first sight, an unsurprising but not insignificant finding when considering the Qur'anic origins of the terms as well as the translators' religious backgrounds.[215] In what follows, I argue that *fiṭra* in al-Fārābī not merely connects different strands of his thought (revealing its complexity and interrelatedness) but also appears to be an

[211] As Dunlop notes, the fact that al-Fārābī first had to learn Arabic (to a very high level) aids the general assumption that he did not know Greek nor had the time to properly learn it ("The Existence and Definition of Philosophy," *Iraq* 13, no. 2 (1951), 78).
[212] E.g. Dunlop, "The Existence and Definition of Philosophy," 77.
[213] Contained in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (ed.), *Manṭiq ʾAristū* Vol.2 (Kuwait: Wakālat al- Maṭbūʿāt, 1980).
[214] Zenker (ed.), *Kitāb Arisṭūṭālis al-musammá qāṭīghūriyā ay al-maqūlāt = Aristotelis Categoriae*.
[215] I should add that a brief read through the *Tadhīb al-ʾakhlāq* (*the Reformation of Morals*) of (usually in scholarship referred to as) al-Fārābī's Christian student, Yaḥya ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), does not yield any references to *fiṭra* either (however, I have not systematically examined any of his logical works). This is despite the fact that he believes in a tripartite soul, led by a rational soul that distinguishes humans from animals (and identifies good/bad deeds and, while theoretically in all, can be more disposed towards virtues or vices (cf. *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī: The Reformation of Morals,* ed. Sidney H. Griffith (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), section 2.11f, p. 22/23f), as well as the idea of a perfect/complete human (*al-insān al-kāmil/al-tāmm*) who is a leader by nature (*bī-l-ṭabʿ*) (cf. ibid., section 5.2, p. 112/113). He speaks of natural dispositions that make one ready to develop virtues (cf. ibid., section 1.5, p. 8/9), making use of both *ṭabʿ* and *ṭabīʿa* (ibid.) and also frequently uses the term *gharīza* (innate). The author also elaborates the process of inheriting, developing, and perfecting virtues. While the idea and function of Farābīan *fiṭra* is thus there, Yahyā ibn ʿAdī does not use of the root *f-ṭ-r* (either as noun, adjective, or verb). This seems fitting not only considering his own religious background but also scholarship's vision of the work as bridging Muslims and Christians via a more neutral 'philosophy.' Importantly, Ibn ʿAdī is known to have copied several of Farābī's works (cf. John A. Watt, "Christianity in the Renaissance of Islam: ʾAbū Bishr Mattā, al-Fārābī, and Yahyā ibn ʿ Adī," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages. Christlich-muslimische Gespräche im Mittelalter,* ed. Martin Tamcke (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 103). I should add that Gerhard Endress notes that we do not actually have much evidence for the assumption that he was al-Fārābī's student (beyond the fact that he is said to have copied some of his works, alongside his brother) and "the specific concepts of al-Fārābī's philosophy, his cosmology, and the metaphysical and ethical foundations of his 'science of the community' (*al-ʿilm al-madanī*) are absent from the thought of the Christian" ("Theology as a Rational Science Aristotelian Philosophy, the Christian Trinity and Islamic Monotheism in the Thought of Yaḥya ibn ʿAdī," in *Ideas in Motion,* ed. Damien Janos, 223).
There is, contrastingly, evidence of the use of the term in later Medieval Jewish philosophy (maybe, I could imagine, following Maimonides reading of Farābī since he speaks in 2.36f of the *Guide* of the different human dispositions).

original contribution that would influence Islamic thought for centuries afterwards. This argument rests on three insights: the fact that he seemed to insert *fiṭra* in his commentary activity, his broader philosophical approach to his Greek sources, and parallel treatment of other central terms. I will briefly treat all three of these in this section.

What we know about a famous debate between al-Fārābī's teacher Mattā ibn Yūnus and the grammarian and Mu'tazilite theologian ʾAbū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī (d.979)[216] lends support to my claim that al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* has significance in the philosophical debates of his time. Taking place in Baghdad in 932, before vizier Ibn al-Furāt, the debate centered on the place of logic in Islam and the relation between grammar and logic (or whether a Greek science could offer a universal truth above the Arabic language).[217] Mattā ibn Yūnus is declared defeated in the end, leaving it to students such as al-Fārābī and Yahyā ibn ʿAdī to support his claims regarding the universality and necessity of Aristotelian logic. As we have seen above, in the *Alfāẓ,* al-Fārābī argues for a vision of logic as the universal grammar of the human intellect. Here I want merely to point out that in the exchange, al-Sīrāfī twice uses *fiṭra,* both times in apparent contrast with al-Fārābī's arguments discussed in detail in this chapter. The basic argument al-Sīrāfī is making is that Mattā ibn Yūnus is wrong to promote Greek logic as superior since this would only make sense if logic were derived of an impeccable *fiṭra* that would justify such universal claims.[218] In the second instance, he uses *fiṭra* and *ṭibaʿ* (pl. *ṭabʿ*) in parallel to argue it is unnatural to suppose

[216] For more background on al-Sīrāfī, see Genièvive Humbert ("al-Sīrāfī," in *EI TWO*). For a fuller description of the debate and its background see Mahdi, "Language and Logic in Classical Islam," in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture,* ed. Gustave E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1970), 51-83; as well as Endress, "Grammatik und Logik: Arabische Philologie und griechische Philosophie im Widerstreit," in *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter,* ed. Burkhard Mojsisch (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1986), 296ff.

[217] David S. Margoliouth, "The Discussion between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Saʿid al-Sirafi on the Merits of Logic and Grammar" (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1905): 79-129) contains both an Arabic and English version as well as an introduction to the debate. In the following I rely on, and in parts modify, this edition and translation.

[218] Cf. AR in Margoliouth, 96. Though he concedes that maybe in the case of mathematics, such universality may exist, transcending conventional differences between people. These very general things aside, however, logic is an outgrowth of a particular language's grammar.

that a universal science like logic could bring an end to natural human diversity of opinions.[219] Sīrāfī explicitly quizzes Mattā ibn Yūnus on the issue of natural diversity; however, he speaks of *ʾikhtilāf bi-l-ṭabīʿa* and *al- ʾikhtilāf al-ṭabīʿī* in this context. It is worth quoting this exchange in full since it shows Mattā ibn Yūnus's support of the basic idea of a natural human diversity which his opponent rejects:

> [Sīrāfī] Would you say that people's intelligences (*ʿuqūl,* pl. of *ʿaql*) are different (*mukhtalifa)* and that their shares therein (i.e. intelligence) are diverse (*mutafāwita*)?
> Mattā ibn Yūnus: Yes.
> [Sīrāfī]: Is this disparity (*tafāwut*) and difference (*ikhtilāf*) by nature (*bi-l-ṭabīʿa*) or acquisition (*ʾiktisāb*)?
> Mattā ibn Yūnus: By nature (*bi-l-ṭabīʿa*).
> [Sīrāfī]: So how can there be anything herein whereby the natural difference (*al-ikhtilāf al-ṭabīʿī*) and the original disparity (*al-tafāwut al-ʾaṣli*) can be removed?[220]

While it is noteworthy that Sīrāfī does not use *fiṭra* here, the foundation (there is a natural diversity of intellects) from which al-Fārābī would argue his own position (namely that the principles of logic are universal and as such rooted in nature), as well as some of the tension contained in that argument (whether all can access/receive these principles equally, given human diversity) is prefigured here.[221] I am tempted to see in this exchange a context, if not an impetus, for al-Fārābī's connection between his logical arguments and the concepts of *fiṭra.* Especially Sīrāfī challenged

[219] Cf. AR in Margoliouth, 97.
[220] ET in Margoliouth, 116 (modified); AR also in Margoliouth, 97. To be clear, Sīrāfī thinks what is natural by *fiṭra* is a diversity of opinions, which precludes a universal science of logic. However, he disagrees that there is a natural (*bi-l-ṭabīʿa*) diversity of intellects.
[221] Sīrāfī appears to believe in what Mahdi calls "the natural equality of all nations and all 'reasonable' men" ("Language and logic in classical Islam," 69). The opposite, Mahdi argues, is nonsensical to Sīrāfī since if we assume divergence as well as the ability of the superior nations to teach the inferior, such an approach "assumes original and natural inequality among nations in intelligence and, at the same time, apparently an ability on the part of the naturally inferior nations to learn perfectly all the arts and sciences, including the highest arts and sciences, of the most superior nation" (ibid., 70). Instead, Sīrāfī thinks knowledge is equally spread across the earth and there is a natural, constant disagreement that defies universalism.

his teacher Mattā ibn Yūnus[222] to make arguments in Arabic, for an Arabic speaking audience and used the idea of *fiṭra* to disagree with him.[223]

What we know of al-Fārābī's broader approach to Greek philosophy also supports the impression that *fiṭra* is something of importance or at least of use to al-Fārābī, using a familiar and potentially theologically significant term to introduce (and maybe also to back-up?) his arguments about a hierarchically ordered humanity with implications for logic, politics, and ethics. In the introduction to his *Kitāb al-qiyās al-ṣaghīr* (*Short Book on Syllogism,* i.e. *Prior Analytics*) he describes what he deems the necessary method of translation of Aristotelian philosophy into a native register.[224] He aims in the work to be faithful to the Aristotelian arguments but seeks to "express these matters as much [as possible] in the terms widespread among the people who speak Arabic."[225] By this he means "using in the explanation of rules examples widespread among the people of our time,"[226] just as Aristotle expressed his thought "through customary terms among the people of his language"[227] and "examples that were widespread and common among the people of his time."[228] He thus sees himself as replicating Aristotle's own approach, given that the examples and language he used are not familiar to his audience.[229] This is not deemed innovation but a necessary update that allows Aristotle's thought to be still relevant.[230] As an illustration of

[222] I should note that John A. Watt recently argued that scholarship ought to pay closer attention to the impact of al-Fārābī's teacher Mattā ibn Yūnus, particularly regarding the spread of the *Organon* and particularly concepts (such as the conception of religion as an imitation of philosophy). He hence wonders "if al-Fārābī's interpretation of these works was not that of Mattā" ("Christianity in the Renaissance of Islam," 108).
[223] Cf. AR in Margoliouth, 97 and 98.
[224] In the following I translate from the Arabic edition published by Rafiq al-ʿAjam in volume 2 of *al-Manṭiq ʿinda al-Fārābī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986). In parts I follow an English translation by Nicholas Rescher in *Al-Fārābī on Aristotle's* Prior Analytics (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963).
[225] AR in al-ʿAjam, 68.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.
[228] AR in al-ʿAjam, 68f.
[229] Cf. AR in al-ʿAjam, 69.
[230] "Thus, it is not adopting his precedent to express these matters to the people of our language by using Greek words, even though he, when he composed them expressed them in Greek. Rather, to follow him is to explain what is in his book to the people of any language by means of their accustomed words. Likewise, in regard to examples to adopt his

this technique in this work one can point to his use of Qur'anic injunctions to speak the truth or wash oneself as examples.[231] As Alexander Orwin notes, Farābī's efforts for linguistic translatability of new philosophical terms into Arabic was based on the assumption that "the philosophers can overcome such conventional problems by playing with the conventional rules, which, unlike certain grammarians, they do not regard as sacred."[232] However, Orwin also acknowledges that the desire to make philosophy communicable in a new context is more easily applied to general terms. Terms of religious or political significance are more difficult as they are "more deeply rooted in a given human situation […] [and] have in many cases already been prescribed by pre-philosophic tradition. In this case, it is necessary for philosophers to have recourse to the unique, traditional vocabulary of their language while reflecting more deeply on their meaning."[233]

Finally, al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* not only seems innovative and useful in backing up his teacher's argument, or a mere example of his broader commitment to philosophical translation, but also is in line with his more general approach to other Islamically relevant concepts such as prophecy, the imamate, *Shari'a* or law more broadly. In this context Mahdi has emphasized the need to realize that during al-Fārābī's time, it was not merely the case that religion shaped his approach to philosophy, rather we ought to envisage "a complex process of transformation and interpretation."[234] One example Mahdi appeals to is Farābī's use of Qur'anic language in his *Attainment of Happiness* (including 'the certain truth' (*al-ḥaqq al-yaqīn*) or the notion of 'going

precedent is to limit ourselves only to what he brought forward, but to follow in his footsteps in this regard is to explain the canons found in his books to the people of very art and every science and to the scholars in every age by means of examples which are familiar to them" (ET in Rescher, 50).

[231] Cf. ET in Rescher, 113f.

[232] *Redefining the Muslim Community,* 81f. On this issue see also Shukri B. Abed, *Aristotelian Logic and Arabic Language in Alfārābī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

[233] *Redefining the Muslim Community*, 84.

[234] *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 38.

astray' or 'being lost' (*ḍalāl*)). As Mahdi argues, it is possible that Farābī means to given [these terms] a meaning or a content different from their generally accepted meaning or content."[235] Similarly, Orwin stresses the fact that "while Alfarabi learned from the Greeks, he wrote primarily for Muslims and minorities living under Islamic rule."[236] Unlike older generations of scholarship, such as Rosenthal or Walzer, who saw purely Greek origins for all of Farābī's thought, I want also to stress his Islamic context and audience. And while Farābī does not directly discuss the question of transfer of political vocabulary, Orwin sees him as doing so when using the Islamic 'umma' for nation, 'imam' for ruler, and 'sharia' for law in his political works[237]. In all of this Orwin sees Farābī apply his own dictum that "an author should cite mainly the examples most familiar to his readers."[238]

However, in this broader context and with regard to the question of *fiṭra* in particular, the question arises as to the meaning of using such Qur'anic language. Thus, Joel Kraemer has argued that *falāsifa* such as al-Fārābī described the Greek philosopher king as an *imām* and warfare as *jihad f*or purely linguistic reasons: "with Hellenic concepts in mind, they often employed Islamic vocabulary on the linguistic level."[239] However, the emphasis is to be placed on 'linguistic' and hence the meaning of such a practice is to be regarded with caution. Taking clues from Strauss, Kraemer believes that "despite the patina of Islamic vocables on the linguistic level, the Falāsifa diverge radically from true Islamic doctrine on substantive questions concerning the nature of the

[235] *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 173.
[236] *Redefining the Muslim Community,* 11.
[237] Ibid., 84.
[238] Ibid., 87. However, Orwin also mentions that there is some debate over the question of whether Farābī was indeed aware of the religious significance of terms such as 'umma' (of which Orwin is convinced and which would be of interest to his use of *fiṭra* as well) or whether he feigned ignorance, which is what a majority of scholars seem to assume (cf. ibid., 87ff).
[239] "The *Jihād* of the *Falāsifa,*" *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987): 290.

best polity and the purpose of justified warfare."[240] For Kraemer the use of concepts such as *jihād* or *sharīʿa* and *sunna* (in addition to *nāmūs* and *qānūn*) is not an expression of efforts to harmonize but rather a form of "rhetorical-political accommodation."[241] Still, I am not convinced that we can really degrade the language as mere window-dressing, an opportune use of words. Given al-Fārābī's own interest in translation and the pervasiveness of the notion of *fiṭra* throughout his works, I doubt that we can dismiss this linguistic reality as quickly.[242] I am thus inclined rather to agree with Ann Lambton that "in his political works al-Fārābī seeks to make classical Greek tradition intelligible to Muslim readers in the context of revealed religion."[243] Using terms familiar to a Muslim audience, al-Fārābī made philosophy a not merely Greek prerogative.[244]

While I believe that there are thus three reasons pointing us to the significance of al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra,* there is a broader question of both his self-understanding and conception of the relation between Greek philosophy and his Islamic (or even Muslim) audience. I believe highlighting the use of *fiṭra* as well as al-Fārābī's particular understanding thereof contributes to

[240] "The *Jihād* of the *Falāsifa,*", 291. Rather than a form of meaningful participation, the use of the vocabulary shows "the fundamental alienation of the Falāsifa from the ultimate aspirations of the society in which they lived" and also serves as an illustration "of their artful accommodation to the Islamic lexicon by means of a hermeneutic and rhetorical reinterpretation of root concepts" (ibid.).

[241] "The *Jihād* of the *Falāsifa,*" 295. As Kraemer puts it, such use of terms is "an attempt to persuade the audience, whether by subtle allusion or express designation, that the themes they were discussing conform with the Islamic motifs with which the audience was familiar" (ibid., 293).

[242] This is also the position of scholars such Erwin Rosenthal, who argues that Farābī used explicitly Quranic terms to "effect an assimilation of Plato's imperfect states to Islamic notions" (*Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, 137). More recently, Erez Naaman has argued that despite the fact that al-Fārābī's political philosophy "is based on classical political philosophy and uses terms derived from it, al-Fārābī's discussion contextualizes and adapts it in a new way that is congruent with Islamic history and the role played by the Prophet" ("Nurture over Nature: Habitus from al-Fārābī through Ibn Khaldūn to ʿAbduh," 8). Finally, it is noteworthy from the perspective of absence that al-Fārābī never cautions or comments upon his use of *fiṭra.* As Ulrich Rudolph notes, he is known to have done so in the case of *ʿaql* (in his *Risāla fī l-ʿaql*), commenting on its imprecise use in *kalām* ("Al-Fārābī und die Muʿtazila," in *A Common Rationality: Muʿtazilism in Islam and Judaism,* eds. Camilla Adang, Sabine Schmidtke, and David Sklare (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2007), 69f). Jacques Langhade in his study of the relationship between Qur'an and philosophical vocabulary in al-Fārābī briefly mentions *fiṭra* but does not make anything of it (cf. *Du Coran à la philosophie. La langue arabe et la formation du vocabulaire philosophique de Farabi* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1994), 195, 359, and 360).

[243] *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 317.

[244] However, I am cautious about Lambton's further claims regarding al-Fārābī's belief in/efforts towards a harmonization of Islam and Greek philosophy at a more abstract level.

the larger issue of the character of 'Islamic philosophy.' In this context Stephen Menn has argued that "al-Fārābī does not see himself as an innovator, but as a transmitter of Greek scientific philosophy to the Arabic-speaking Muslim world."[245] However, this does not mean, as some have thought in the past, that such engagement with philosophy was what we might describe as value neutral, meaning that the particular language or religion of writers did not matter.[246] We might thus envisage, exemplified through the use of *fiṭra,* a shared effort of scholars to engage philosophical thought but this shared effort expressed itself through the particular linguistic and cultural background of thinkers. Sidney H. Griffith speaks about a desire during the translation movement for a "shared moral discourse […] which would leave their mutually incompatible, religious differences safely enshrined within a commonly accepted ethical framework,"[247] yet also cautions against earlier scholarship's conviction that those participating in such a discourse simply surrendered their religious and linguistic traditions. While we may speak of a project that transgressed communities, those who participated were members of "their own communities."[248] One way of bringing this back to al-Fārābī is to see his use of *fiṭra* as part of a broader effort of interpreting "the terms of current Islamic religion as symbols for universally valid philosophical terms."[249]

[245] "Al-Fārābī's *Kitāb al-ḥurūf* and his Analysis of the Senses of Being," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 18 (2008): 62.
[246] Olga Lizzini speaks of "the common language of Greek science and Aristotelian logic" ("What does *Tawḥīd* mean? Yaḥya ibn ʿAdī's *Treatise on the Affirmation of the Unity of God* between Philosophy and Theology," in *Ideas in Motion*, ed. Damien Janos, 257) and so does Gerhard Endress ("Theology as a Rational Science," 221).
[247] "From Patriarch Timothy I to Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq: Philosophy and Christian Apology in Abbasid times; Reason, Ethics and Public Policy," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages. Christlich-muslimische Gespräche im Mittelalter,* ed. Martin Tamcke, 92.
[248] Ibid., 93. In the same volume, John W. Watt stresses the diversity of hats scholars at the time wore and their efforts to coordinate them ("Christianity in the Renaissance of Islam. ʾAbū Bishr Mattā, al-Fārābī and Yaḥya ibn ʿAdī," 99-112).
[249]John A. Watt, "The Syriac Aristotelian Tradition and the Syro-Arabic Baghdad Philosophers," 31.

V. Conclusion

In summary, we have seen that al-Fārābī's utilizes his conception of *fiṭra* as the innate, insufficient, and above all variable human substance/set of dispositions/faculty in his logical, political, and ethical writings. It supports a natural hierarchy of human beings in all three of these areas without denying certain shared characteristics and the benefits of education and formation for all. Most significantly, it appears as if al-Fārābī consciously chose to use the word '*fiṭra*' as part of his efforts of engaging Greek philosophy for Arabic speakers familiar with the Qur'anic term. While the differentiation from *ṭabʿ/ṭabīʿa* is hard to discern at times, it appears that al-Fārābī added reference to *fiṭra* in an effort to respond to counterarguments (like those levelled against Mattā ibn Yūnus), affirming the existence of inborn first intelligibles, natural hierarchies in politics, and divergence between and across moral formation as well as demonstrative ethics. Overall, this turn to *fiṭra* and al-Fārābī's particular conception thereof would prove influential for other Islamic philosophers, as I will show in the following chapters. In this context the tensions described above, especially regarding the status of moral formation, ethical knowledge, the idea of a source of the first intelligibles, and the use of *fiṭra* to differentiate different groups of humans rather than emphasize their commonalities, are of particular importance since they continue to show up in the works of his readers and lead to significant divergences in the realm of religion, politics, and ethics.[250] On a more abstract level, I believe that I have made enough of a case for the idea that by using *fiṭra,* al-Fārābī justified and clarified what he found in his sources and inherited from his teachers for the presumed audience of his days. In this way, I believe attention to *fiṭra* as

[250] One reason for these tensions, according to Rudolph, might be the fact that al-Farābī's logic was not one finished system but rather shows his life-long engagement with Aristotelian corpus (*Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt,* 413). One possible explanation for this non-systematic or closed reading is thus what he describes as al-Fārābī's lack of a stable terminology and a shifting relationship with certain concepts. What is consistent, however, is that this is true nor merely for his logic for also al-Fārābī's cosmology, metaphysics, and ethics and politics (ibid., 435).

a Qur'anic term familiar to all those who come in contact with the Qur'an and the prophet's sayings, makes a contribution to larger discussions over the 'Islamic' nature of Islamic philosophy and its status *within* and relation *to* more explicitly 'Muslim' thought.[251]

Be that as it may for now, overall, I have argued that al-Fārābī's conception and use of *fiṭra* is contextual: his treatment of *fiṭra* conveys fundamental insights from his engagement with Greek philosophy for an Arabic speaking and potentially Islamic audience. In the next three chapters I look at the ways in which three prominent philosophers in the Western Islamic lands use and develop al-Fārābī's conception of *fiṭra* in their own context and with respect to their own pressing concerns and interests. I begin by turning to Ibn Bājja, widely understood to be the first reader of al-Fārābī in Andalusia.

[251] Shahab Ahmed in *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) most recently took up the question of the 'Islamic' nature of Islamic philosophy. I relate my arguments regarding *fiṭra* to his claims in chapter 7.

Chapter 4:
The Plight of the Weeds and the Desire for Human Sociality: Ibn Bājja (d. 1138) and Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 1288) on the Place of Sociality in the Life of the Exceptional

I. Introduction

This chapter investigates the use of *fiṭra* in discussions of the role of the exceptional in society in Ibn Bājja (d. 1138/9). While the exact nature of *fiṭra* remains hard to pinpoint, the political implications of the concept and its implications for questions of education and revelation remain topics of inquiry. In the following chapter we will see that attention to *fiṭra* in Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* points not merely to a deep gulf between the masses and the exceptional sage, or between *fiṭra al-fāʾiqa* and a deficiency (*naqṣ*) in *fiṭra*, but also has larger political implications. In fact, Ibn Ṭufayl suggests that the intellectual difference between the few and the many precludes the philosopher's teaching the masses, who are in need of and sufficiently served by the messenger. And, given their different needs and goals in life, this makes the isolation of the sage the best solution for all concerned.[1] In what follows I argue that while Ibn Bājja seems to provide the basic building blocks for Ibn Ṭufayl's use of *fiṭra* to point to an intellectual gulf amongst people that necessitates social separation, the former's understanding of the concept appears slightly different and thus in turn also leads to a somewhat different reading of the politics of *fiṭra.* While the dangers of the exceptional remaining within the imperfect city animate Ibn Bājja's *Tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid,* his idea of the philosopher, the one of exceptional *fiṭra,* as one of the weeds (*nawābit*) suggests that he still believes in the

[1] W. Montgomery Watt puts this as follows: for Ibn Ṭufayl "philosophy is seen to be incapable of directing the lives of the inhabitants of the state. It can lead a few selected individuals to the highest felicity, but to reach this they must retire from active life. In other words, the *summum bonum* of the philosopher has become mystical ecstasy" (*Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1962), 139).

(theoretical) possibility of bringing about the perfect city. Thus, despite sharing Ibn Ṭufayl's sense of a deep gulf between the few and the masses, Ibn Bājja leaves open the potential reform of the city—a process in which the philosopher might have some role.

However, this chapter will also show that affirmation of the special status and potentially isolated life of the philosopher was short-lived. We will see that Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 1288) in his *al-Risāla al-Kāmiliyya* responds to the claims regarding the (possible or necessary) isolation of the philosopher as based upon Ibn Bājja's and Ibn Ṭufayl's reading of *fiṭra* by affirming the absolute necessity of sociality in the lives of all human beings. In this he is closer to the arguments of Ibn Ṭufayl's successor, Ibn Rushd, who also placed the existence, growth, and happiness of the philosophers squarely within human society.[2] However, unlike any of the other engagements with the question of the exceptional philosopher and society, Ibn al-Nafīs consciously refrains from resort to *fiṭra.* He appears to have very little faith in the concept and rather focuses on the question of sociality, implicitly denying the idea of a gulf between humanity that necessitates separation and suggests different kinds of fulfilment for different kinds of human beings. Having highlighted the central role of the concept of *fiṭra* for the question of sociality and politics, I will argue that Ibn al-Nafīs's life of Kāmil is a response to Ibn Bājja's and Ibn Ṭufayl's claims regarding the happiness of the solitary philosopher and the dangers of human sociality. At the same time, its emphasis on sociality puts the work in conversation with the political thought of al-Farābī and Ibn Rushd. However, the encounter with Ibn al-Nafīs makes clear that—withstanding this insistence on the sociality of humans by some *falāsifa* and thus their differing political philosophies—what unites all the *falāsifa* in this dissertation is that they hold a vision of humanity as separated by a gulf of *fiṭar.*

[2] Ibn Rushd's conception of *fiṭra* and its implications for political questions occupies chapter 6.

II. The Exceptional Sage as a 'Weed' and the Possibility of the Perfect City

ʾAbū Bakr Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ṣāʾigh Ibn Bājja was probably the first Islamic philosopher in the West and also a poet, musician, and polymath who wrote on astronomy, botany, and mathematics.[3] We know little about his life apart from the fact that he was born at the end of the 11th century near Saraḳusṭa (Saragossa) and that he was possibly of Jewish descent.[4] What we do know is that he was caught up in the political upheavals of his time, serving the Almoravid ʾAbū Bakr b. Ibrāhīm al-Ṣaḥrāwī before being thrown into prison for several years as a traitor. When the Christians took Saraḳusṭa, he was travelling through the west of Spain but was imprisoned again by the successor to the previous ruler, this time on charges of heresy. However, after his release he served a twenty-year vizierate to the next ruler and travelled, spending time in Seville and Granada. He died in Fez in 1139, according to legend from the effects of a poisoned fruit sent to him because of his sharp tongue. It is possible, as Oliver Leaman suggested, that one of the reasons Ibn Bājja is the least studied of the major Islamic philosophers, apart from the meagre availability of his works, is the questionable character that Muslim tradition ascribed to him.[5]

His most famous works, the *Tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid* (*The Rule of the Solitary*)*, Risālat ittiṣāl al-ʿaql biʾl-insān* (*Conjunction of the Intellect with Man), Risālat al-wadāʿ* (*Farewell*

[3] Joseph Montada boldly claims that "Aristotelianism entered al-Andalus through him" ("Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* ed. Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165). On the pivotal role of Ibn Bājja as the first Western commentator of Aristotle and inspiration to Ibn Rushd see also Paul Lettinck, "Ibn Bājja's Commentary on Aristotle's *Physics,"* in *Akten des Zweiten Symposium Graeco-Arabicum, Ruhr-Universität Bochum 1987,* ed. Gerhard Endress (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1989), 32-40. Finally, on the question of where Ibn Bājja got his philosophy from, see Douglas Morton Dunlop, "Philosophical Predecessors and Contemporaries of Ibn Bājjah," *Islamic Quarterly* ii (1955): 100-116.

[4] Dunlop, "Ibn Bājja," in *EI TWO.*

[5] Oliver Leaman, "Ibn Bājja on Society," *Der Islam* 57 (1980): 109.

Letter), and *Kitāb fī'l-nafs* (*Book on the Soul*), all focus on the possibility of the union of the soul with the divine. As D.M. Dunlop explains, Ibn Bājja takes conjunction as "man's highest activity and the ultimate felicity, as well as the final end of human existence."[6] Such a conjunction is the result of an intellectual ascent, "by means of a continuous process of abstraction from the impressions caused by sensible objects consisting of matter and form, through a hierarchy of spiritual forms (*ṣuwar rūḥāniyya*) containing progressively less and less matter."[7] The influence of Ibn Bājja's thought on these questions is far from restricted to Islamic thought, gaining prominence among Jewish and Christian thinkers of the medieval period quickly. And while his works are of a very different register than the philosophical tales of either Ibn Ṭufayl or Ibn al-Nafīs, we will see that they nevertheless connect the issue of *fiṭra* with the questions of the messenger's role in human life and the question of human society through his account of the exceptional philosopher as a weed.

The idea of the philosopher as a weed is curious. While indebted to Farābī in the application of this term to the philosopher, Ibn Bājja (seemingly uniquely) spins it from generally negative connotations into a positive one. As we shall see, the weeds are characterized by their ability to spring up by themselves in the imperfect cities, holding onto truth among a majority of lost citizens.[8] This reading is in contrast with both the broader Islamic tradition and

[6] Leaman, "Ibn Bājja on Society," 109.

[7] Ibid. On the role of Ibn Bājja as the foremost thinker on the possibility of conjunction between a human being and God, see Michael Blaustein, "Aspects of Ibn Bājja's Theory of Apprehension," in *Maimonides and Philosophy: Papers Presented at the Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter (May 1985),* ed. Shlomo Pines (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1968), 202-212; and Alexander Altmann, "Ibn Bājja on Man's Ultimate Felicity," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (English Section) (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 1: 47-87. On the particular nature of that conjunction as rational (rather than mystical) see Sami Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 71.

[8] On the Platonic idea of the philosopher as a weed and the reception thereof in al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Ṭufayl see Michael S. Kochin, "Weeds: Cultivating the Imagination in Medieval Arabic Political Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 3 (1999): 399–416. He notes that there is a discussion of weeds in Ibn Bājja's botanical treatise, which, however, does not seem pertinent to the political issues in question (cf. 407 n. 42). For a Spanish-Arabic version of the botanical treatise, including a Spanish introduction, see Miguel Asín Palacios (ed. and trans.),

our own immediate associations. For the implications of a name such as weed are certainly not beauty, inciting to pleasure or the desire to be around them. Yet the image does also evoke words of political significance such as opposition, subversiveness, and independence. Weeds are hard to stamp out. They arise without care or attention. They sometimes overgrow a beautiful meadow. To the notion of the philosophers as resilient and resistant to cultivation, Ibn Bājja adds the idea that they exhibit the unique righteousness of the few who see the truth among unfavorable conditions surrounding them. In fact, he seems to imply that their presence becomes a reason for the change of the city to a more perfect version of itself. Most importantly for our interests, the uniquely resilient and righteous philosophers described as weeds are also the people of exceptional *fiṭra* for Ibn Bājja. Unlike Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Bājja thus posits both a social existence and role to those of exceptional. Despite sharing the idea of an intellectual gulf that divides the philosopher from the masses, Ibn Bājja disagrees with Ibn Ṭufayl regarding the need for emigration and isolation (despite reassuring his readers that were they have to emigrate, perfection is still possible). While Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl thus disagree with al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd over the inherent sociability of all humans, Ibn Bājja—unlike Ibn Ṭufayl—still has some hope for the reform of the city. He leaves open the possibility for the exceptional to remain among the masses and thus suggests that not all sages must fail at having a social impact. Like feeds, the exceptional can indeed overgrow and change a failing city.

i) *Fiṭra* in Ibn Bājja's thought

"Avempace Botánico," *Al-Andalus* 5 (1940): 255-99. For an in-depth discussion of the term and its background see Ilai Alon, "Fārābī's Funny Flora: Al-nawābit as 'Opposition,'" *Arabica* 37 (1990): 56-90.

As Majid Fakhry has noted, al-Fārābī's philosophy developed a significant after-life in the Islamic West, beginning with Ibn Bājja.[9] It is thus unsurprising, as we will see shortly, that Ibn Bājja appears to have taken over the main thrust of al-Fārābī's conception of *fiṭra,* particularly in its logical role. Ibn Bājja was familiar with the Fārābīan corpus of logical writings since he commented extensively on it. Beside his own treatises, we have Ibn Bājja glosses on al-Fārābī's *Isagoge,* the *Categories,* the *Five Sections, De Interpretatione,* as well as the *Prior Analytics* and the *Posterior Analytics.*[10] Additionally, as I will discuss below, it seems likely that Ibn Bājja was familiar with al-Fārābī's *al-ṣiyasa al-madaniyya* since this work discusses the notion of the weeds.[11] Overall, it thus seems likely that Ibn Bājja was also familiar with al-Fārābī's logical and political use of *fiṭra;* and, as I will discuss below, he takes it over in large parts. *Fiṭra* for Ibn Bājja is determinative of one's ability to engage in logical discourses and, as result, also has significant implications for the ordering of the city and the place of those exceptional ability therein.

Ibn Bājja's commentary on the five sections (*al-fuṣūl al-khamsa*) [12] already mentions in the introduction that those who do not have these *fuṣūl,* either by a strong *fiṭra* (*bi-l-fiṭra al-qawiyya*) or by guidance (*irshād*), are unable to teach the art of logic.[13] He then reiterates this in the first *faṣl,* speaking of the one "who lacks by his *fiṭra*" and thus "due to a lack of his *fiṭra*" cannot teach others.[14] Ibn Bājja thus affirms the two central aspects of al-Fārābī's use: *fiṭra* as the source of doing logic and the idea of qualitatively different *fiṭar* that differentiate people.

[9] *Al-Fārābī: Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism* (Oxford, Oneworld Publications: 2002), 137.
[10] Majod Fakhry has edited and published Ibn Bājja's commentary on the *Categories,* the *Five Sections, De Interpretatione,* as well as the *Isagoge, Prior Analytics* and the *Posterior Analytics* in *Ta'ālīq Ibn Bājah 'alá manṭiq al-Fārābī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1994). He also edited and published his commentary on the *Isagoge* separately in "Ta'āliq Ibn Bājah 'alá kitāb Īsāghūjī " (*al-Abhath* 23 (1970): 33-52).
[11] Here the political use of *fiṭra* is quite obvious, distinguishing primarily between the different classes of people.
[12] AR in Fakhry, *Ta'ālīq Ibn Bājah 'alá manṭiq al-Fārābī* (1994), 63-76.
[13] Cf. AR in Fakhry (1994), 64.
[14] AR in Fakhry (1994), 64 (my translation).

Both of the aspects Ibn Bājja repeats in the second *faṣl* where he argues that he "who lacks by his *fiṭra* the connection with the *muqaddamāt*" is unable to teach logic.[15]

Another reference to *fiṭra* occurs in Ibn Bājja's glosses on the *Kitāb al-burḥān.*[16] Although he discusses the question of the origins of certainty briefly[17] and exclusively by way of *ṭabʿ* and *ṭabīʿa;* and, similarly, speaks of the ability for logic as the defining feature of the human being without recouse to *fiṭra*,[18] *fiṭra* does show up towards the end of the comments. When discussing the difference between certainty by essence (*dhāt*) and accident (*ʿaraḍ*), he describes the former as known by *fiṭra,* which means that there is no doubt.[19] This seems in harmony with what we saw in the previous chapter with regard to al-Fārābī's conception of the role of *fiṭra* in logic: namely to supply the principles of ultimate certainty. However, as we also saw, al-Fārābī does not make the weight of this argument in his own *Kitāb al-burḥān* but rather elsewhere. The terse reference in Ibn Bājja's glosses does hence not seem surprising.

Ibn Bājja's comments on the *Isagoge*[20] also make a distinction between those born (*maftūran*) with a faculty for demonstration (*quwwa al-burḥāniyya*) and those with one for sophistry,[21] underlining the idea of people's distinct dispositions for certain types of discourses as a result of creation. The commentary on the *Prior Analytics* (*Kitāb al-qiyās*),[22] also speaks of *fiṭra*[23] as the source of the syllogisms (in clear parallel with *ṭabʿ*) and determinative before

[15] AR in Fakhry (1994), 65 (my translation). The fourth *faṣl* on the distinction between what is necessary by itself (*dhāt*) and by accident (*ʿaraḍ*) Ibn Bājja makes frequent use of *ṭabʿ* alone which supports my overall impression that he mainly uses *fiṭra* to speak of differences or inequalities (especially in the context of logic and broader intellectual ability).
[16] Edited and published by Fakhry, *Kitāb al-burhān wa kitāb ṣarāʾiṭ al-yaqīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987).
[17] Cf. AR in Fakhry (1987), 123f.
[18] Cf. Ibid., 144.
[19] Cf. Ibid., 151.
[20] References are to the edition of this commentary edited and published by Fakhry in *Taʿālīq Ibn Bājah ʿalá manṭiq al-Fārābī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1994), 24-51.
[21] Cf. AR in Fakhry (1994), 36.
[22] References are to the edition of this commentary edited and published by Fakhry in *Taʿālīq Ibn Bājah ʿalá manṭiq al-Fārābī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1994), 180-194.
[23] Cf. AR in Fakhry (1994), 187.

birth.[24] His summary of the *Kitāb al-taḥlīl*[25] makes use of a distinction between the *fiṭar* of a few and most people, underlining the variety of *fiṭar*.[26] Similarly, in his commentary on the *Categories,* Ibn Bājja writes right at the beginning that rather than by thinking or deliberation, all well-known concepts are the result of the *fiṭra.*[27] They are basic to logic, which, in contrast, proceeds via deliberation.[28] Overall, it seems safe to say that under the influence of Fārābīan logic, Ibn Bājja posits a similarly foundational but varied vision of *fiṭra.* However, unlike al-Fārābī he is much less precise about the concept of the first principles as well as their content. In fact, most references to *fiṭra* are quite in passing and seemingly without much interest in the matter. Nowhere could I find a similarly precise discussion of the role of *fiṭra* in logic comparable to al-Fārābī.

It is thus quite fitting that *fiṭra* occurs only once in the *Tadbīr.*[29] There are many references to *surā, dhāt,* and *ṭabīʿa,* with the latter being the focus of an entire section.[30] However, when talking about the individual spiritual forms in the 6th *bāb,* section 13, Ibn Bājja does use *fiṭra* when explaining the multiple spiritual forms. It appears as if *fiṭra* contains some of the spiritual forms that occur naturally:

> This form (*surā*) is in the *fiṭra* of the animal, like matter created (*maṭura*) to be able to accept the form. However, it is not from by itself, but rather in some other way. And surely, we said this in many places. The support of the living being's nature (*ṭabīʿa*) is

[24] Cf. AR in Fakhry (1994), 193. Both of these references are interesting since al-Fārābī's *Prior Analytics* (*Kitāb al-qiyās*) does appear to only use *ṭabʿ*.
[25] References are to the edition of this commentary edited and published by Fakhry in *Taʿālīq Ibn Bājah ʿalá manṭiq al-Fārābī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1994), 195-225.
[26] Cf. AR in Fakhry (1994), 217. Al-Fārābī speaks of *fiṭar* and *ṭabʿ* in the original once (*al-Mantiq inda al-Fārābī,* ed. Rafiq al-ʿAjam (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986), 120).
[27] AR in Fakhry (1994), 80. Interestingly, in the section on the *kayfiyyāt* Ibn Bājja does not mention *fiṭra* (as al-Fārābī does).
[28] His comments on al-Fārābī's *De Interpretatione,* unlike al-Fārābī's work itself, do not make recourse to *fiṭra.*
[29] References in the following are to the English translation in Ma'an Ziyadah, *Ibn Bājja's Book* Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid: *An Edition, Translation and Commentary* (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1968), as well as the Arabic text published by Ziyadah as *Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid* (Beirut, 1978).
[30] Cf. AR in Ziyadah (1978), 117-119. I indicate when I follow Ziyadah's translation (1968) and when I offer my own translation based on the AR in Ziyadah (1978).

> only by way of this spiritual form. These spiritual forms are the ruler of the living being. Now the nature (*ṭabīʿa*) of the living being is compounded so that it needs many forms. An explanation of this will occur in another, suitable place. [31]

There is an explicit connection to Greek thought here since the context is one of arguing that according to Plato "nature (*al-ṭabīʿa*) does not mistake what distinguishes it from the soul."[32] The idea here seems to be that *fiṭra* supplies or contains those naturally occurring spiritual forms, though the passage mainly uses *ṭabīʿa*: "nature (*al-ṭabīʿa*) gives the soul the (suitable) form, as when nature desires cooling the stomach of a feverish person so water appears to it."[33] Put together, the naturally occurring spiritual forms are in the *fiṭra,* yet Ibn Bājja explains that it is not specifically water that is being naturally desired. Rather, water is just an accident as the person desires a cooling agent. Water is one of many things that are cool and moist.[34] While the notion of the spiritual forms being in the *fiṭra*, which again resides in human nature, appears to be more in line with broader, Qurʾanic ideas about intuition or a natural form, as well as some of the claims about the basic, shared human *fiṭra* we saw in al-Fārābī. The overall message appears to be one of a preparing disposition and one that denies specificity (and thus, as we saw,

[31] AR in Ziyadah (1978), 111 (my translation). Ziyadah translates this passage as following: "This form is in the nature of the animal, like matter which is constituted naturally to receive the species, but not to receive the species as such, but rather in a different aspect. We have explained that on many occasions. The sustenance of the nature of the animal is through this spiritual form, and this form is the controller of the animal. Since the nature of the animal is compounded, it needs any forms. The explanation of this will be discussed on another suitable occasion" (ET in Ziyadah (1968), 128).

[32] AR in Ziyadah (1978), 111 (my translation). Ziyadah translates this as "nature does not make mistakes concerned what it lays down in the soul" (ET in Ziyadah (1968), 127).

[33] AR in Ziyadah (1978), 111 (my translation).

[34]Ziyadah translates as follows: "Those forms occurring naturally are also either accidental or essential. The essential are not particular forms of bodies, as has already been stated because a thirsty person has no desire of specific water; rather, he desires all that belongs to the species of the desired object […]. These objects produce particular spiritual forms only by accident. An example of the accidental forms is a thirsty man who recalls in his what he had enjoyed in a certain glass, or a hungry man who recalls the form of food and remembers a certain food which he had eaten. Nature does not produce essentially except proper and true spiritual forms. Thus when a feverish person desires to cool his stomach, he desires coldness which is necessarily useful for him; but coldness does not reach him necessarily with cold objects because the contain other elements. That is why a cold object, although it us cold and moist, may be tough for the feverish person and mixed with earthly elements such as (special) conditions of water. Therefore, Plato says that nature does not make mistakes concerning what it lays down in the soul. Nature gives the soul the (suitable) form, as when nature requires cooling the stomach of a feverish person whose souls recalls water. Water is not cooling nor does the soul recall water, but rather water is a cold object with other elements which are not recalled by nature and which may harm the feverish person" (ET in Ziyadah (1968), 127).

in agreement with al-Fārābī's vision of a *fiṭra* underdetermined in the realm of ethics). Additionally, the idea that the animal might have a *fiṭra* is very curious, though not completely unheard of as we saw with al-Fārābī.[35] The difficulty of interpreting this passage is only increased by the repeated references to clearer explanations elsewhere, a claim Ibn Bājja often makes but rarely follows up on.

The *Risālat ittiṣāl* (*The Conjunction of the Intellect*) and *Risālat al-wadāʾ* (*Farewell Letter)* each reference *fiṭra* once and these passages appear to be the basis of Ibn Bājja's arguments regarding the status of the philosopher and the benefits of separation. They might even be the sources of Ibn Ṭufayl's arguments regarding a gulf between the elite and the masses, though this is obviously hard to prove given how little we know about Ibn Ṭufayl's intellectual formation. In any case, they are, like the reference in the *Tadbīr,* somewhat unclear. Each appears to think of *fiṭra* slightly differently.

In the *Risālat ittiṣāl,* [36] *fiṭra* shows up in conjunction with the, by now familiar, adjective *fāʾiqa.* As we will see in the case of Ibn Tufayl shortly, the idea here seems to be something of a seat of theoretical knowledge. The passage relates to Ibn Bājja's notion of what makes the human. Here he explains that humans when they are born can be likened to animals for they are initially "like the animal lacking reason, which moves about and desires." [37] He then further makes clear that when an infant, a human is "an actual animal but a potential human" as he is still without "the faculty of discursive thought (*al-quwwa al-fikriyya)*."[38] Ibn Bājja then goes on

[35] There was, as we saw in the previous chapter, at least one reference in al-Fārābī's *Kitāb al-ḥurūf* that made it seem like animals too could have a 'specific form' or *fiṭra,* broadly conceived.
[36] References are to the English translation contained in Jon McGinnis and David Reisman (eds. and transl.), *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 269-83. Fakhry has collected several of Ibn Bājja's works in *Ibn Bājjah: Opera Metaphysica* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1968), including the treatise on conjunction.
[37] ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 272.
[38] ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 273.

to deny the idea that "the intellect is numerally one in every human," for then all "people who exist (both those who passed away and those who remain) are numerically one."[39] That humans are numerically one he thinks is absurd. Rather, Ibn Bājja believes that the intellect, which is in fact one, "is a reward and a blessing of God bestowed upon whomever of his servants with Whom he is well-pleased."[40] By this he means the following:

> Whoever obeys God and does what he pleases Him will be rewarded with this intellect, and He will make before him a light by which he will be guided. Whoever disobeys Him and does what displeases Him will remain shrouded in the shadows of ignorance until [his soul] separates from the body, being concealed from him and remaining in His displeasure. The latter are the classes of those who do not apprehend by discursive reasoning, and therefore God completes their knowledge through religious law.[41]

Given that the next paragraph refers to those of exceptional *fiṭra* (*al-fiṭra al-fāʾiqa*) it seems likely that those described here as rewarded with the intellect are these people.[42] They relate to God in a special way whereas the others rely on the revealed law (*al-sharʿ*).[43] However, while thus see both an intellectual and a differentiating use of *fiṭra* here, it is noteworthy that this intellect is a gift from God. The difference between people in their ability to reason and thus also to relate to God in different ways is thus anchored in divine will and providence.

Fiṭra explicitly comes up in the next paragraph, when Ibn Bājja examines whether intelligibles are numerically one. He writes:

> Whenever we posit that every intelligible is numerically one, there necessarily follows an opinion akin to that of those who adhere to transmigration, where having a superior nature [better: exceptional *fiṭra*](*al-fiṭra al-fāʾiqa)* does not benefit one, and following the life of nature [better: natural life] (*al-sīra al-ṭabīʾī)* is greater than much beneficial knowledge. As for the kind of [knowledge], it will belong to every human as part of the

[39] Ibid., 274.
[40] Ibid., 274.
[41] Ibid. Ibn Bājja then adds: "to whomever He gives this intellect, then, when he separates from the body, he remains a light of lights that extols and glorifies God together with the prophets and companions as well as the martyrs and the pious souls, and he is judged an intimate friend by those" (ibid.).
[42] Later he affirms that "the intellect is many" it appears (ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 277).
[43] It is interesting that Ibn Bājja introduces the aspect of punishment here, which seems different from Ibn Ṭufayl's description of those of lesser *fiṭra* and in need of law (as trying their best).

> natural course, and thus teaching will not provide qualitatively [different knowledge], but only qualitatively [more knowledge].[44]

As Ibn Bājja makes clear, the idea that intelligibles are numerally one is parallel to the idea of the intellect being numerically one and the same absurd consequences follow. The important aspect of this quote is that Ibn Bājja here denies the idea of transmigration, which he takes to mean the idea that there is a single soul for all humanity.[45] Instead, he believes there is a contrast drawn between the superior capacity and the life of nature. Additionally, the former style of life appears to be of benefit. The most we can say is that *fiṭra* here is again used intellectually and in order to differentiate different kinds of humans.

David Wirmer, who has commented on this passage, argues that we can witness a development here: namely, that Ibn Bājja's use of *fiṭra* is part of a trend in which "traditional, religious terms were overlaid with a new rationalistic sense."[46] According to Wirmer, this reading of *fiṭra* not only influenced Ibn Rushd in his *Faṣl al-Maqāl,* it also intricately connects to Ibn Bājja's notion of the weeds. According to Wirmer we ought to think of *fiṭra* in Ibn Bājja as an excellent natural potential or capacity ("exzellente Naturanlage"[47]) with respect to scientific thought. As such, it at once lays claim to the true understanding of God from the site of philosophy and also defines the criteria for the natural elites.

What is important here is the notion of difference that Ibn Bājja affirms in the wake of negating some form of human unity. Connected to that is the question of education, for Ibn Bajja appears to deny that some form of natural life is superior. A little later Ibn Bājja then explains what makes natural philosophers special. It is not their connection to the intelligibles, which is

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[44] ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 275 (modified); AR in Fakhry (1968), 162.
[45] ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 271. Footnote 8 on 272 notes that as far as we known Ibn Bājja thought of transmigration or *tanāsukh* as a form of panpsychism or the idea that "there is but a single soul for all humans."
[46] David Wirmer, *Vom Denken der Natur zur Natur des Denkens* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 106 (my translation from the German). We may note that his assessment might apply to the entire project of looking at *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa.*
[47] Ibid.

just like that of the masses as it is "by one and the same means and on the basis of one and the same practice;"[48] rather they are "superior only to the extent of the superiority of the conceptualization."[49] As he explains, both philosopher and masses share a natural way of relating to the intelligbles. However, the superiority of the philosopher has to do with the fact that he "progresses further and so investigates intellegibles not as intellegibles, which are termed 'material' and 'corporeal,' but as one of the things existing in the world."[50] The idea that there is both something shared across humanity and the philosophers are special because they can relate in a special way also comes in Ibn Rushd as we will see.

Ibn Bājja describes the differences between the masses and the philosopher in a section on the different ranks of people.[51] Here he explains that there are three ranks of people. The lowest is that of the masses who are "linked merely with material forms" through physical contact and ordinary practical skills.[52] The highest rank is that of the happy ones, "who see the thing in itself."[53] In between is the rank of the philosophers, who "consider the intelligible first, and the objects second,"[54] whereas the masses "consider the objects first, and the intelligible second" and do so for the sake of the subject.[55] Ibn Bājja explicitly connects the idea of the three ranks to the Platonic discussion of the cave. Those who live in a cave are the masses, who do not see the sun but only its shadow reflected. The philosophers or theorists are outside and see the light. And then there are those, who are happy; they are the thing in itself and so they do not see at all. For the rest of the treatise Ibn Bājja then elaborates on this idea of the ranks, likening

[48] ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 276.
[49] Ibid.
[50] ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 277.
[51] Cf. ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 278-80.
[52] ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 278.
[53] Ibid., 279.
[54] Ibid., 278.
[55] Ibid.

them to a polished mirror[56] and thus evoking common Sufi ideas. We thus see again that while the details are open to debate, the connection between using *fiṭra* and commenting upon Platonic debates over the different kinds of people and their political role is very apparent.[57]

The idea of a natural elite of philosophers resurfaces in the Farewell Treatise (*Risālat al-wadāʿ*).[58] Here Ibn Bājja addresses himself to his student Ibn al-Imām and all those that share the special kind of *fiṭra*. As Wirmer puts it, people of this special potential are brothers in intellect, travelling together on the road to theoretical knowledge (*ʿilm naẓarī*) even if they are not physically together.[59] Ibn Bājja writes:

> It is evident that every act other than studying only brings about perfection for the man by means of someone else distinct from him and to limit oneself to these acts [meaning: others than studying] is like the restriction of the horseman to the existence of his horse. And, like some of the trades /crafts serve another (trade) by nature (*dhāt*), like that some of the *fiṭar* that belong to some people assist others. So that we find that whoever is created to be a carpenter, he is not created to be something other than that. So that he is only disposed to serving others and his perfection is to serve others and this is his most desirable/virtuous existence (*wujūdātihi*). And the person of perfect (*kāmil*) *fiṭra* he is the one created to be just for himself. And so, it is clear that the exceptional *fiṭra* is the *fiṭra* by which one attains theoretical knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-naẓarī*). And you have the exceptional *fiṭra* and you should take care that you do not take it down to the level/rank of deficiency (*manzila al-nāqisa*), lest you be striving/toiling for someone else, by limiting yourself to doing something other than knowledge. Lest you be the most reprehensible of the wrongdoers in terms of wrongdoing, for you are wronging a creature that deserves more from you and that is you. And the strength of your injustice is related to the level/rank to you which you bring down [your *fiṭra*] from its permanent level.[60]

The ideas here seem to support what we saw in the previous statement regarding *fiṭra* and the broader discussions on the place of the philosopher. There is a gulf between the masses and the elite, and each of them is made for something else. This clearly connects our discussion to the idea

[56] Cf. ET in McGinnis and Reisman, 281.
[57] We may note that al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd divide people by the different discourses they are suitable for (seeing the philosophers as highest).
[58] References are to the Arabic text published by Charles Genequand in *La Conduite de l'Isolé et Deux Autres Épitres* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2010).
[59] Wimer writes that they are "Brüder über die Zeit hinweg weil der aktive Intellekt, der Punk ihrer Identifizierung, auf den sie bereits als Wissenschft Treibende immer schon bezogen sind, ewig ist" (*Vom Denken der Natur,* 107).
[60] AR in Genequand, 103f (my translation).

of ranks above and the idea that certain kinds of people relate to the truth in certain ways. In more detail here, the particular task of *fiṭra* is to attain theoretical knowledge. The person who can attain this, the theoretical philosopher, is one of excellent *fiṭra* and he is to focus only on studying alone. Most importantly, people of such a *fiṭra* ought to keep themselves from falling into the danger of association or exposure to those of lower *fiṭra.* There is even talk here of wronging oneself by not adhering to the heights of which one is clearly capable. This notion of *fiṭra*, then, is in line with what we saw above and appears to provide the basis for the way of the philosopher since it is his God-given capacity for thinking.[61] Besides explaining what makes the philosopher special and indicating why such a person could, separate from society, attain his happiness in Ibn Bājja's thought, we should also note that this passage might be the basis for Ibn Ṭufayl's language of excellency and deficiency. [62] For here we clearly see the idea of different kinds of *fiṭar,* of a beneficial separation, and the overall claim that it is via his *fiṭra* that Ḥayy could reach such lofty heights in his search for the divine.

[61] Such a conception, Wirmer claims, might stem from Farābī's reading of the *Organon* and the idea that there is a place for the basic structures of knowledge, the one that holds the first intelligibles or primary principles. This place, for Ibn Bājja is both the active intellect and *fiṭra,* providing principles to the mind without any reflective activity.

[62] The benefit of separation aside, it appears as if *fiṭra* for Ibn Bājja is the source of theoretical knowledge and the reason for the philosopher's special insight (according to Wirmer, there seems to be both an intellectual basis shared by all humans, being a sort of *fiṭra mushtaraka* (or a general availability of intelligibles to humans) and others kinds.). His particular ability is the "habitual presence of the proofing power (*quwa burhaniya*) without having to first gain it." (*Vom Denken der Natur*, 110 (my translation)*;* see also Wirmer's discussion of a previously unexamined fragment that contains a conversation between Ibn Bājja and Ibn Sayyid on acceptable proofs. Apparently, the relation of the sides of a triangle is something known not through proof but by *fiṭra* (*yuʿlam bi-l-fiṭra*) (*Vom Denken der Natur,* 63)). Wirmer connects this idea in Ibn Bājja to Aristotle, arguing that, like in Ibn Sīnā, the excellent *fiṭra* allows people to grasp without help the middle terms of syllogisms and make proofs. While this habit to proof can be acquired, some, who are destined for philosophy, have it by nature. Thus, in a letter to his student Ibn al-Imām, he notes that proof-oriented thinking (*fikra burhaniya*) is part of each healthy human, who has the potential to accept that. And referencing Themisthius he says that some people by nature (*tabʾ*) have a superior talent (*fiṭra fāʾiqa*). He finally goes on to explain that the actual outcome is then a mix of being born and developing. Yet some also never get it, as the *Farewell Treatise* indicates: here we learn of a certain David from Britannia who was full of desire for knowledge and traversed different religious groups without ever making it because he lacked the necessary *quwwa burhaniyya.*

We may note that the connection between *fiṭra* and Themistius' *First Analytics* in its Arabic translation is very interesting, unfortunately, howeverm the only written evidence of this work is lost in Arabic. It exists only in a few Hebrew fragments. For the Arabic reference see Jamāl al-ʿAlawī, *Rasāʾīl falsafīyya* (Beirut, 1983)*,* 90.

The reference to the danger of descending into the abode of deficiency raises the question in which ways *fiṭra* can be affected. It seems that the possibility of one's exceptional *fiṭra* being dragged down by less exceptional people motivates the idea of solitude. At the same time there is a clear sense, especially in the reference to *fiṭra* and broader discussion of the ranks in the *Letter of Conjunction* that the ordering of humans according to their intellects is fixed. Nowhere does there appear to be a sense of educability; rather, we saw that qualitatively Ibn Bājja denies any change in knowledge. This would be in line with what we saw in Ibn Ṭufayl's pessimism regarding Ḥayy's naïve teaching efforts and his overall recommendation of a full retreat from society. What is clear, however, is that the danger of a descent of the exceptional *fiṭra* motivates Ibn Bājja's discussion of isolation, both in the *Tadbīr* and more broadly. The political consequence of a need to separate and the question whether happiness exists outside the polity that such a step might entail are clearly implied here. *Fiṭra* as pointing to (potentially God-given) intellectual differences between different ranks of people clearly connects to questions of Platonic concern, meaning political discussions over the place of the philosopher, his relation to the city and the masses, and whether humans are political animals per se or not. It is to those political consequences that I will turn shortly.

For now I would like to note that the distinctiveness of Ibn Bājja's reading of *fiṭra* as pointing to an intellectual gulf among people becomes even clearer if we turn to some of his pseudo-writings as collected by Jamāl al-ʿAlawī.[63] Here *fiṭra* shows up in two falsely attributed letters, with the first making merely a brief mention and the second actually focusing on the topic.[64]

[63] Collected in *Rasāʾīl falsafīyya.* These are writings that used be thought of as authored by Ibn Bājja, but which are very likely not in fact written by him. On p. 37ff al-ʿAlawī discusses in detail why he thinks these letters are not original, citing such indicators as the fact that early readers, including Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd, having seemingly no knowledge of them.

[64] Letter 2, on the theoretical knowledge and the perfection of man, once mentions the people of the excellent *fiṭra* (*al-ʾaṣḥāb al-fiṭra al-fāʾiqa*) (AR in al-ʿAlawī, 157). However, the reference here is to a people who have perfected their humanity and as such have arrived at knowledge of the active intellect. While this might not be as relevant,

The more interesting passage for our purposes is the second reference, a discussion of *fiṭra* in letter 5 on the excellent (*al-fāʾiqa*) *fiṭar.* The break with Ibn Bājja's other works is very clear here as the excellent *fiṭra* has a very different meaning. The entire letter is full of references to God, his angels, and messenger and while *fiṭra* is still the perfection of the human being, that means mainly a preparation for the acceptance of truth, in this case, the truth of God's creation and the like.[65] Rather than being connected to the active intellect, *fiṭra* is firmly related to the divine. Thus, it is by their *fiṭar* that the messengers arrive at a knowledge of God.[66] And this is also true for humans, as the final section of the letter makes clear: it is their excellent *fiṭra* that draws us closer to God and provides us with the first intelligibles of knowledge.[67] While there are clearly some overlaps with Ibn Bājja's use of *fiṭra* discussed above (including the adjective *fāʾiqa* and the support in acquiring the first intelligibles), the author of this letter has theologized the concept. The context is one of knowing God and aspects of his revelation, such as the messenger or the angels. The particular reading and its role in intellectual conjunction as well as isolation appears buried or even lost. It is therefore to the question of what this intellectual reading of *fiṭra* might mean for the life of the philosophers and the masses or how Ibn Bājja thinks of the benefits of isolation of the exceptional, the mutual influences of different *fiṭar,* and the imperfect city's potential for reform, that I will examine now.

ii) The *Tadbīr* and the politics of isolation

we may simply note the prevalence of the terminology of an excellent or distinct *fiṭra* that Ibn Ṭufayl so frequently makes use of.

[65] AR in al-ʿAlawī, 175.

[66] Cf. AR in al-ʿAlawī, 176.

[67] Ibid., 178.

The *Tadbīr,* which Ibn Bājja left unfinished, broadly focuses on an explication of the aforementioned process of intellectual ascent, including Ibn Bājja's idea of the different kinds of forms. It is at once his most famous work and his most practical.[68] Two of al-Farābī's works of political philosophy (his *al-Siyāsāt al-madaniyya* and *Fuṣūl al-madanī*) heavily influenced those aspects that are of interest to us: namely Ibn Bājja's thoughts regarding the weeds (*nawābit*) and their duty to emigrate to the ideal cities.[69] However, I want to suggest that unlike al-Farābī and his successor Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Bājja's solution to the question of the perfect sage in an imperfect city can take different forms, seeking to achieve "withdrawal to a life of speculation within the existing imperfect cities."[70] As we will see, this decision turns not, in fact, on a different reading of the idea of *fiṭra,* for both Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl see the philosopher and the masses distinct by their exceptional and deficient *fiṭar* respectively. Rather, Ibn Bājja has a different conception of the possibility and desirability of bringing about the perfect city. Unlike the utterly removed, possibly even naturally grown Ḥayy, the exceptional men in Ibn Bājja's mind are not otherworldly but rather like weeds: they appear, at least in theory, capable of overgrowing and changing the city. This means that retirement is one option to secure the solitude recommended in order to protect those of exceptional status from the corrupting influence of the masses, but neither a necessity nor seemingly a real recommendation.[71] At the same time, the political function of the exceptional for Ibn Bājja is

[68] For the idea that the *tadbīr* is a response to Ghazālī's attack on philosophy, showing the triumph of the rational soul and the possibility of moral perfection, see Mongi Chemli, "La Philosophie morale d'Ibn Bājja à travers *Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid*," *Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes* 31 (1968): 167-221.

[69] If they indeed exist. If not, it might be better for such men, strangers in their own lands, to die (cf. Dunlop, "Ibn Bājja").

[70] Dunlop, "Ibn Bājja."

[71] This is in disagreement with an early authority on this matter, Steven Harvey, who believes that Ibn Bājja did not in fact think any cities could be rehabilitated (cf. "The Place of the Philosopher in the City according to Ibn Bājja," in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy. Essays in Honor of M. S. Mahdi*, ed. by Charles E. Butterworth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1992), 228). Joseph Montada agrees with this, arguing that for Ibn Bājja intellectual happiness is possible but political happiness is not" ("Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl," 165). He, like many others in this camp, believes that political philosophy was not actually a concern of Ibn Bājja, who

different than the political leadership envisaged by al-Fārābī or Ibn Rushd. Rather actively ruling, it appears that the philosopher can and must hope to impact society only through their example.

As I indicated already, the *Tadbīr* is a somewhat strange work. For one thing, it ends very abruptly and most likely at a place earlier than intended by its author, lacking a proper conclusion. Moreover, the explicit goal of the work, speaking about the happiness of the solitary philosopher in the imperfect city, only occupies about two pages (as well as a few lines dropped here and there) in a much larger discussion of seemingly unrelated issues. As Steven Harvey puts it, the *Tadbīr* "hardly seems to be a work on political philosophy," given the absence of any discussion of different political regimes, laws, and the like.[72] Ibn Bājja does open the book with a short reflection on the term rule or governance (*tadbīr*). We learn that rather than merely "one single action" by which a person intends "a certain end," a *tadbīr* is "manifold" and deals with an action as "having *tartīb* (arrangement)."[73] There is governance of the city, a household, God's governance of the world, yet Ibn Bājja spends no time on questions of actual governance or the different kinds of cities since others, such as Plato, have already spoken with authority on such matters. Because the *Tadbīr* is no straightforward work of political philosophy, it provides incomplete evidence of its author's view of the philosopher and his place in the world.[74]

Nevertheless, in the beginning Ibn Bājja does briefly speak about the perfect city and home in relation to the imperfect, noting the diseased and sick state of the latter. In short,

instead focused his work nearly entirely on the attainment of philosophical knowledge through a perfection of the rational faculty.

[72] "The Place of the Philosopher in the City according to Ibn Bājja," 228.

[73] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 52.

[74] The *Tadbīr* is divided into a number of unevenly sized sections: the first is entitled "the meaning of *tadbīr*" and the second "on human actions." The third section is his "discourse on the spiritual forms" and it is by far the most substantial part of the work, numbering 17 subsections.

perfection of the city is "the realization of the natural end of Man"[75] and it is "characterized by the absence of the arts of medicine and jurisprudence."[76] This is due to the fact that for one, "relations among all the citizens are based on love and there is no dispute among them." Where there is no dispute, there is no need for a judge.[77] Second, since "all actions in the perfect city are proper […], people do not eat harmful foods."[78] Thus, there is no need for any medical consultations or remedies and enough physical exercise to avoid sicknesses.[79] In contrast with the absence of doctors and judges in the perfect city, an imperfect city needs both. Indeed, "the further a city is removed from the perfect city, the more it needs them, and the more honorable is the rank of these two kinds of people."[80] Ibn Bājja then reiterates the perfection, seeing himself in agreement with the *Nicomachean Ethics:*

> In the perfectly virtuous city every citizen is given the best of that for which he is prepared. All of its opinions are correct; none are false. Its actions are exclusively and absolutely virtuous ones […]. It is clear then that every view—different from that of the citizens—which comes into existence in the perfect city is false, and every action different from what usually takes place in it, is wrong.[81]

While in the four types of imperfect city there is a place for disagreement, in the perfect city "there is no place for the ideas of those who believe and act in a way different from that of the perfect city."[82] While Ibn Bājja never fully spells out the identity of the four imperfect cities, it is clear that the perfect city is where harmony reigns.[83]

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[75] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 56.
[76] Ibid., 57.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] This is a curious point, equating the idea of medicine with the less ideal city, a concession to imperfect existence. It connects, it seems, to some of the ideas regarding a balanced diet in *Ḥayy* and the seeming absence of any illnesses in that story. Moreover, it might be significant that both Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn al-Nafīs were themselves doctors and seem to make less of the point of medicine as a concession than Ibn Bājja.
[80] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 58.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 59.
[83] Is this a form of authoritarianism since no dissent is allowed? Ibn Bājja would probably deny such a charge since the absence of conflict, rather than its suppression, characterize the perfect city.

In the imperfect city there is in fact room for improvement. For in such a city "a man may fall short in respect to an action and be led (to the good) naturally or by learning it from another and performing it."[84] This is so since "it is possible there to hold a false opinion, and yet a certain man may recognize its falsity."[85] Thus, while most people are accepting "false sciences," "a man may, either naturally or by learning it from another, find the correct alternative of two contradictories."[86] A person "who discovers proper actions and learns correct knowledge not existing in the city" is indeed the solitary from the title of the work: a man who holds "correct views that do not exist in a city, or the contraries of which are held in the city."[87] Another name for solitaries is *al-nawābit* or weeds. Generally, "any man who does not share the belief of the citizens of the city, whether true or false," might be described as a weed, though "the more numerous their ideas and the greater their effect, the more does this name apply to them."[88] The name has to do with the shared quality of plants that "grow up spontaneously" and for Ibn Bājja the term is reserved only for those who have "correct views."[89] Now since the *nawābit* are those who hold the correct views amongst a majority of falsely informed citizens, it is clear "that one of the characteristics of the perfect city is the absence of weeds."[90] This is the case whether one means by weed the particular sense of the term (somebody who holds correct views), or the more general idea (anybody who holds views opposed to the deceived masses). All views are correct in the perfect city and dissent cannot exist since then the city "would become sick, lose its nature and cease to be perfect."[91] While the imperfect cities might have weeds, "this is the

[84] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 59.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 59.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 59f.
[91] Ibid., 60.

cause of the occurrence of the perfect city."[92] Michael Marmura calls the notion that the weeds are the cause for the emergence of the perfect city Ibn Bājja's "most tantalizing statement"[93] and I agree with him. The weeds are the sign of the imperfect city and they at once point us to its character of disharmony and the possibility of its transformation.

It is here that we have reached the proper purpose of the work: the guidance of such a rightly guided man (or, in his terms, the solitary (*mutawaḥḥid*) or weed) living in the imperfect city. For a person who is perfect but lives in an imperfect city has "only the happiness of the solitary man and the sound *tadbīr* (for them) would be the *tadbīr* of the solitary, whether there be one such solitary person or more than one."[94] The only condition is that "neither a nation nor a city agrees on their view," meaning they are truly alone in their opinions.[95] They are, as he notes, the people the Sufis mean when they speak of 'strangers,':

> For although they live in their countries and among their comrades and neighbors they are strangers in their views and have travelled in their thoughts to other levels which become for them their countries.[96]

The goal of the work is, then, explicitly to write on the governance of this kind of person, or what he calls "the *tadbīr* of this solitary man."[97] He, by living in an imperfect city, "lives in unnatural circumstances" and Ibn Bājja hopes to "discuss how he should guide himself to attain the best of his existence."[98] Like a doctor, who discusses how to get a sick man back to health, he examines how the solitary "is to obtain happiness when it does not exist, or how he is to eliminate the obstacles which prevent him from obtaining happiness."[99] It is here that the

[92] Ibid.
[93] Michael Marmura, "The Philosopher and Society," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1979): 318.
[94] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 60.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 61.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid. In a final paragraph, Ibn Bājja draws out the comparison between his work and a doctor, noting that "the one establishes the medicine of souls; the other, the medicine of bodies; the government the medicine of social relations"

scholarly disagreements over the nature of solitude in Ibn Bājja's thought arise for he now notes that "preserving happiness, which is similar to preserving health, is possible neither in the three types of city, nor in what is composed of them."[100] It appears as if the only way to healing, to obtain the happiness that the weed seeks, is unattainable in the imperfect city just as a diseased body cannot be made whole without removing the source of illness.

Now since no other form of governance is of interest but the self-governance of the solitary in the imperfect city, it is first of all surprising that, as I noted above, so few pages of the work are actually dedicated to this issue.[101] The actual advice is succinct as it is radical and we shall return to it below. Harvey summarizes by saying that according to Ibn Bājja, the solitary can, even in the imperfect city, "achieve the end sought after in the perfect city," which is to become one of the intellects through intellection.[102] Yet in order to do so, he must keep as much as possible separate from those who do not share his higher aspirations. Although there is a "practical need for the city," Ibn Bājja urges his readers that the solitary ought to have contact with the broader city "only with regard to those matters indispensable for his own existence and only to the extent that they are indispensable."[103] Such is the essence of the work in short and the nature of the claims regarding the exceptional philosopher's inability to attain his highest goal in a diseased society.[104]

(ibid.). Yet the latter two, if the city were perfect, would not be necessary, just as the idea of a weed and his governance would be.

[100]Ibid. We may note that there is a curious slip from four imperfect cities to three here.

[101] Though it is of course entirely possible that a longer version of the *Tadbīr* would have included a more substantive treatment of the question at hand.

[102] "The Place of the Philosopher," 210. Yet the quote above from page 60 showed that generally these individuals do "in their countries and among their comrades and neighbors."

[103] "The Place of the Philosopher," 210.

[104] After this introductory section, Ibn Bājja examines what makes human actions human. Discussing the difference from inanimate and animal actions, he argues that human actions are always marked by choice (inanimate actions are merely necessary and animal ones moved by such emotions as anger or fear). And the solitary, he believes, should always strive for human actions, meaning he should always be "motivated by reason and right opinion rather than passion" (Harvey, "The Place of the Philosopher," 211) Such actions are the most divine and hence move him closer towards his intended purpose. The discussion of the question of the different kinds of acts takes up a

The rest of the work is a lengthy epistemological discussion of the spiritual forms (*al-ṣuwar al-rūḥāniyya*). While an interesting choice with a view to the title and stated purpose of the work, I agree with Harvey that this section is not to be neglected in a search for Ibn Bājja's political thought. As Harvey argues, in order to show the way to happiness, Ibn Bājja had to focus on "what this ultimate happiness is and, more important, to what extent it is in reality attainable."[105] Now since that goal is intellectual, "intellecting the simple substantial intellects," and results in a conjunction with the active intellect, it makes sense that the work took the shape it has.[106] The essence of the argument is that individual spiritual forms in a man relate to the universal spiritual form, or the active intellect. The aim is to make corporeality disappear. Human acts can be categorized according to their relation to spiritual forms, from lower and corporeality-focused ones to actions directed at spirituality. While there are debased people of pure corporeality and noble ones of pure spirituality, most humans fall in between. The solitary now aims at overcoming his corporeality with reflection and deliberation in solitude, seeking to achieve his perfection.

iii) Human sociality and the possibility of change

As I have already indicated, the argument I am making here goes to some extent against the grain of older scholarship on the question of his political philosophy.[107] Thinkers such as

relatively short part of the work, though does not appear less important to the political questions the author claims to seek to answer.

[105] "The Place of the Philosopher," 225.

[106] Ibid.

[107] On the question of Ibn Bājja advocating a necessary emigration for the philosopher one should note, as Harvey has pointed out, that it is "most striking in light of his teachings [on solitude]" that Ibn Bājja in fact "spent most of his adult life in public service" ("The Place of the Philosopher," 205) While no argument in itself, the historical fact of his political engagement sits a little strangely on a reading of Ibn Bājja as simply breaking with the Greek heritage of political thought and advocating not merely the option but the *necessity* of departure. As Harvey notes, "far from living the life of the solitary, the *mutawaḥḥid,* Ibn Bājja appears to have partaken of society to the fullest; far from eschewing

Erwin Rosenthal argued that Ibn Bājja was in fact unusual amongst the *falāsifa* because he rejected Plato's and Aristotle's ideas regarding the place of the philosopher in society and his civic duties, as well as the truth of Islam.[108] However, in recent years others, such as Leaman, have emphasized the proximity of Ibn Bājja to not only Greek thought but also the *falāsifa* by noting his slightly different context. Rather than focus on the role of the philosopher in society, Ibn Bājja wrote on those living in a hostile environment.[109] The option available in such a situation is in fact not governance, but rather self-governance and the cultivation of the self. Ibn Bājja considered from this angle, Leaman argues, is not too far off from Plato[110] but rather places a different spotlight on the philosopher, while affirming the general sociability of human beings in line with predecessors and successors such as Farābī and Ibn Rushd.[111] However, while I agree with Leaman that Ibn Bājja does not deny the Greek heritage of the human being as political, I want to disagree with his reading of Ibn Bājja's vision of solitude. For he, like most, still argues that like a diseased limb from a healthy body, the philosopher *must* separate himself out according to Ibn Bājja.[112] In the following, I am trying to understand what exactly

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the imperfect city, Ibn Bājja helped administer it" (ibid., 206). We might, however, wonder how surprising this really is since the point of the work is not about Ibn Bājja the man but the place of philosophy in Muslim life.

[108] Erwin Rosenthal, "The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Bājja," *Islamic Culture* XXV, No. 1 (1959): 187-211; and *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 158-174. He, for example, notes in the latter that for all the other *falāsifa* "man is a political being; he must therefore live in a political association which guarantees his life and makes possible his perfection in accordance with his natural disposition" (*Political Thought in Medieval Islam,*158). Ibn Bājja, by contrast, "is exclusively interested in the individual thinker's happiness" (ibid.). It is "a deliberate turning aside from political activity and civic duty, and represents an individualistic mystical attitude which is fully developed in Ibn Ṭufail's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*" (ibid., 168). This is "in direct contrast with Plato's insistence on the contribution of all to the welfare of the community" (ibid., 171f). For Rosenthal this is due to his recognition of the "imperfection of existing states," which forced him "to search for a means to save the divine element in man" (ibid., 171). But the result is devastating no matter what, accusing Ibn Bājja of not only rejecting Plato's demands for civic duty but also turning his back "on Islam and its definite social obligations and observances" (ibid., 173). His "extreme rationalism" and his "denial of social responsibility" isolate him among the *falāsifa* (ibid., 174) and this kind of anti-social stance also turns the divine law into a mere support in what "man's natural ability can achieve unaided" (ibid., 173).

[109] Something al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd only mention as a possibility in passing.

[110] Who, as I will note in more detail in chapter 6, also considered emigration an option for the philosopher, though at the end of a life of service.

[111] "Ibn Bajja on Society," 114f.

[112] Ibid.

Ibn Bājja thinks about the option and potential necessity of solitude, the nature of that solitude between internal separation and physical retirement, and whether there is hope for a change of the imperfect city.

While I agree with Harvey that these arguments are not divorced from real-life implications, I want to question the certainty with which he claims Ibn Bājja's political quietism and call for retirement from the city as the only acceptable form of solitude. The *Tadbīr,* Harvey (along with many others, such as Rosenthal) believes, is not merely a case for the possibility of intellectual happiness but rather also one against "the likelihood of, and necessity for, political happiness."[113] Harvey here makes the connection to the danger of practicing any kind of philosophy at this time and in the Western Muslim lands in particular.[114] Speaking about the solitary, he argues that

> since in our time he will certainly fail, there is no need for him to try. Such an attempt might even be dangerous. The philosopher is told that true happiness can be achieved in the imperfect city and that he should therefore devote himself to developing his intellect, while dealing with the multitude only to the extent necessary.[115]

For him, Ibn Bājja disagreed with earlier *falāsifa* such as al-Fārābī and their hope for reform and a belief in the ability to change the city. Rather, Ibn Bājja paved the way for a kind of a retreat to introspection that not only influenced subsequent thinkers such as Ibn Rushd and Maimonides, but above all stirred Ibn Ṭufayl to write the ending to his *Ḥayy* the way he did.[116] The question of how exactly Ibn Bājja envisaged the relation between the solitary and the imperfect city, as well as the city's capacity to transform is thus a complex one and might be more nuanced than previous scholars allow it to be. To get a better sense of what exactly Ibn Bājja envisages when it comes to the imperfect city and the weeds it is important to move

[113] "The Place of the Philosopher," 228.
[114] Cf. "The Place of the Philosopher," 221.
[115] "The Place of the Philosopher," 230.
[116] Ibid., 232.

beyond the claims of section 1 (mentioned above) and thus beyond the heart of the political aspects of the *Tadbīr* to several smaller passages.

Ibn Bājja at the end of section 3 hints at the possibility of political reform or, at the very least, questions a straightforward belief in the necessity for retirement from the city traditionally ascribed to him. Having discussed the different spiritual forms, our author notes that "by nature (*bi-l-ṭab'*) each of these forms is dear to man and it is rare to find a man without the influence of one of these spiritual forms."[117] Now if a human being lives in the city, all its actions "are directed towards the city itself;" however, that is only the case in the perfect city.[118] In defective cities of all kinds, a person chooses any of the four forms "as a goal and focuses on the pleasure of this goal."[119] The final sentence then claims that "preliminary steps of the perfect city become goals of other cities."[120] It is not entirely clear to me what Ibn Bājja means: the argument seems to be that in the imperfect cities people choose what is only an aspect of the perfect city (namely one of the four spiritual forms) and turn it into a goal itself. The implication here as to the transformation from one form of impoverished city to the perfect one is not clear, though it seems that the possibility of transformation is at least there.

The relation between the solitary and the city resurfaces again in section 5. Here occurs a short explanation of who the philosopher is, setting him equal to the *mutawaḥḥid.* The discussion is one of the different kinds of people and their actions, particularly the performance of spiritual and corporal actions. What we learn is that while the philosopher is a real human being through corporality, such a person is "divine and superior" through rationality since he

[117] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 90.
[118] Ibid.
[119] AR in Ziyadah (1978), 73 (my translation). For a brief reference to the types of imperfect cities see the end of section 4, where Ibn Bājja speaks of timocracy, democracy, and tyranny.
[120] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 90.

performs all intellectual actions essentially. Choosing his actions carefully, he eventually reaches his goal and "communicates with the simple substantial intellects" and ultimately "becomes one of these intellects," and thus "deserves the title 'divine' only."[121] In this state the other two human qualities, corporeality and spirituality, are eliminated, making the person simply divine. Now, in an important parallelism, Ibn Bājja states that "the solitary (*mutawaḥḥid*) may have all these qualities without being a citizen of the perfect city."[122] He then explains that the philosopher or solitary "cannot be a citizen of this perfect city by the first two kinds of qualities, nor its aim, agent, or protector."[123] And the "third quality [intellection] does not make him part of this [the perfect] city, but rather it is its proposed aim; for he cannot be its protector nor its agent while he is a solitary."[124] The solitary is clearly reassured that perfection is possible, outside of any city, and that the role of the solitary is indeed not in the imperfect city. However, by implication there is the idea of a change, with the city having an aim towards which to work and it seems the philosopher plays a role in that process of change. In this vein we also ought to remember that it is in the imperfect city that the weed arises. While there is thus clearly no call to political action, Ibn Bājja seems to leave open the possibility of change.

The seventh chapter puts the question of solitude one last time in the spotlight, making clear why solitude, of some form or another, might be desirable for those who are different. Discussing the particular spiritual forms, Ibn Bājja argues that "each man causes others to move towards his own state," meaning that the virtues of the superior man rub off on the inferior and this is also true for the vices of the latter.[125] To underline this claim he quotes the poet Zayd Ibn ʿAdī al-ʿAbbadī: "Do not ask about a person himself, but rather about his companions, because

[121] Ibid., 117.
[122] Ibid.
[123] AR in Ziyadah (1978), 102 (my translation).
[124] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 117 (modified); AR in Ziyadah (1978), 102.
[125] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 135.

every man is led by his companions."[126] The idea that it is those with whom we surround ourselves that have the greatest impact on our character has grave consequences for political life. Ibn Bājja thus writes:

> It is evident that the solitary (*mutawaḥḥid*) ought not to associate with merely corporeal beings nor with any whose end is a spirituality mixed with corporeality. Rather he should seek the company of the adepts in the sciences. These men of science are now more numerous, now less and even non-existent in some ways of life wherefore the solitary is obliged in some ways of life to return altogether from the society of men as much as this is possible for him. He should not mix with them except in necessary matters and in necessary measure. Or, he should emigrate to ways of life in which the sciences are – if such a way of life does exist.[127]

We have reached the heart of the debate: given the influence that men have upon each other, it is best that the philosopher seeks the best possible life for himself. If possible, this might include the option of retirement from the city, especially if there are others like him. However, while such a physical separation is an option, it does not appear to be a necessity as solitude might come in different forms. It sounds like most of the time the solitude that is appropriate to the exceptional is internal, minimizing contact with those of lesser ability. Yet as the reference to retirement from the imperfect city into a group of companions suggests, sociality is the framework of human existence even of the exceptional philosopher.

That retirement as the most extreme form of solitude is not per se desirable, though potentially necessary, becomes clear as Ibn Bājja is quick to note explicitly that these ideas are not against the claims of political science (*ʿilm al-madanī*) or the science of nature (*ʿilm al-ṭabīʿia*). While we know from these that "man is by nature political (*madanī*)" and that "isolation is wholly evil," this is only so "in essence (*bi-l-dhāt*)."[128] By accident, physical separation can be good in fact: while "bread and meat are healthy nutriment by nature" and "opium and

[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 136.

colocynth are deadly poison," "the body may be in unnatural states where these latter two can be useful and must be used, and natural diets harmful and must be avoided."[129] Meaning, while physical solitude essentially is destructive to humans and sociality good, there are certain situations where the reverse is indeed true. Solitude through retirement becomes a cure to the ills of the presence of others, which, as we learned above, could rub off their vices on the philosopher. Like a healthy body, the perfect city is humanity's "natural state;" here sociality is desirable and good. However, the "unnatural sickness" that is imperfect social life must be, like the ill body, cured by those things that otherwise might be deadly; solitude in our case.[130] Such a way of life, like life in the imperfect cities, is "not natural for the soul" and yet, it appears, it can be useful.[131]

All of this seems to imply that if conditions are really bad, the philosopher can and might even do best by removing themselves, despite the fact that this is in itself not a good action. However, what the exact nature of that solitude entails, meaning whether it refers to a mere separation or whether it in fact describes a physical removal in the form of retirement is not clearly stated. The focus here is that depriving humanity of sociality is essentially bad, can be accidentally good and even necessary, and aims at protecting the weed and his special ability to see the truth amidst the imperfect conditions of his life.[132]

While it is not entirely clear what forms such separation might take or how the philosopher might bring about the change from the imperfect to the perfect city, it is apparent that the *Tadbīr* wants to offer support exactly in those circumstances. It assures the one who

[129] Ibid.
[130] ET in Ziyadah (1968), 136.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Hani Nasri also seems to believe that physical removal is only one option to keep the philosopher separate from corrupting influences but by no means a straightforward obligation ("The Mystic and Society according to Ibn Bajjah and Ibn Ṭufayl," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1986): 225).

decides to leave (whether physically or mentally) that happiness is still possible. However, such a claim is different from either the idea that the exceptionals necessarily have to leave or the pessimistic belief that the perfect city is not possible at all. Ibn Bājja seems to deny neither while assuring those who have chosen to (or had to) withdraw, in whatever form. While there is clearly a differentiation of humanity along lines of truth and excellence and a warning as to the danger of the different groups mixing, retirement is styled as a possible form of solitude but one that is not natural and seemingly presupposes other likeminded individuals. Read this way it makes sense that the author seems to hint at the possibility of the city changing. The weed arises in the imperfect city and while life there is not good for him, a radical emigration does not seem ideal for him or the prospects of the city. While possible in the most extreme circumstances as a measure to protect the integrity of the exceptional, retirement is seemingly the most drastic form of solitude. Enmeshed in this reading, I believe, is the prospect of educability Ibn Bājja hints at. The other side of the danger of descent into lower abodes of deficiency for the philosopher lies the possibility of ascent for the city. This, as we will see in the next chapter, is a very different picture from the life of Ḥayy, who learns that there is i no hope for change (even for an apparently quite healthy society) and that hence emigration is the best for the exceptional and the masses alike. On the one hand, Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl share an intellectual and differing reading of *fiṭra* that—since it points to a gulf dividing humanity—has clear political implications. On the other hand, their particular interpretations leave open different nuances and thus also allow for different consequences.[133]

III. Ibn al-Nafīs and the Fundamental Role of Society: The Life of Kāmil as a Corrective

[133] As we will see, Ibn Rushd would return to the Fārābīan assertation regarding the necessity of sociality.

As the pseudo letters already hinted at, Ibn Bājja's reading of *fiṭra* and the politics of separation that seem to follow from it might not have been uncontroversial. Al-Fārābī, his intellectual influence, was very dismissive of religion as a form of lower discourse and left little room for revelation. Ibn Ṭufayl, his successor, seemed to develop even further and potentially radicalized some of these ideas: not only can the philosopher, on account of his exceptional *fiṭra,* reach all sorts of knowledge; no they can do so even in isolation. In addition to the dismissive or at least lowly estimation of religion, neither al-Fārābī, nor Ibn Bājja or Ibn Ṭufayl, as we will see shortly, offer insight into the role of the messenger for the life of the exceptional philosopher. In this section, I turn to Ibn al-Nafīs and his *al-Risāla al-Kāmiliyya,* which explicitly denies Ibn Ṭufayl's claim that any ideas about God or his worship could have come to even the most exceptional human being in isolation, as well as Ibn Bājja's arguments about the benefits of isolation more generally.[134] Ibn al-Nafīs sidesteps the references to *fiṭra* in *Ḥayy* and Ibn Bājja by avoiding the term altogether. The story of Kāmil and his encounter with other humans is a lengthy argument for the place of theological thought within the social context and the longing of all, even the seemingly exceptional, for human sociality and their need for it for their physical and spiritual happiness. It is thus fitting that Ibn al-Nafīs in no way speaks of or allows for a gulf amongst humanity and instead affirms the shared need of all for the directions of the messenger and the provisions of society. As we will see in the following pages, Ibn al-Nafīs instead is interested in the fundamental role of the messenger and society in directing a

[134] I have not further developed this but it seems possible that Ibn al-Nafīs's tale to some extent illuminates Ibn Rushd's conception of *fiṭra,* as well as his claims about human sociability and the role of religion.

very basic natural knowledge of God.[135] Rather than simply eschewing all extra-revelatory information, he allows for his protagonist to reach the very minimum of theological insight.[136]

However, this seeming overlap with the life of Ḥayy or the happiness of the solitary philosopher morphs into a significant corrective in his hands. [137] For we will see that in stark contrast to Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn al-Nafīs' tale uses the arrival of other human beings at the moment of theological stirring to argue for the necessity of society even in the exceptional human being, both for his religious education and his broader well-being. On the one hand, the Nafīsian response and his plea for the role of society and the messenger in the lives of all humans affirm our reading of the political locus of Ibn Bājja's and Ibn Ṭufayl's intellectual readings of *fiṭra,* despite their different emphases. On the other hand, Ibn al-Nafīs's concern with natural knowledge of God and the guiding and necessary role of society and the messenger for all humans point us forward towards discourses that make reference to *fiṭra* following the *falāsifa.*

i) The need for society and the role of the messenger in the life of Kāmil

ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Nafīs was born near Damascus in 1233, most likely near the village of Ḳurashiyya. We know little about his life since major sources of the time, including ʾAbī

[135] As different or limited such knowledge might be, I do not want to minimize this claim to a natural, very initial knowledge of God as it is still a knowledge! And although Ibn al-Nafīs wants to avoid talk of *fiṭra*, he still gets those things he wants to be known naturally while seemingly emptying the concept of the very grand and potentially very controversial claims of Ibn Ṭufayl's pen.

[136] The idea that all are able to attain basic theological insight (to be developed further in society) in some ways maps onto Ibn Rushd's vision (to be explored in chapter 6). Ibn Rushd, however, despite affirming a general human need for society, does believe in a gulf that separates humanity along lines of *fiṭar.*

[137] As I will explore further in the next chapter, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* enjoyed great influence and fame amongst Enlightenment thinkers, fueling their interest in autodidactism and the intellectual heights a human being could achieve free from religious and social constraints. Yet in his own place and time, Ibn Ṭufayl's tale received very little attention (Taneli Kukkonen, *Ibn Ṭufayl: Living the Life of Reason* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 131). Most scholars believe that much of this silence has to do with what were perceived to be unorthodox claims regarding the abilities of the human being, the possibility of mystical ascent, and the hierarchy between the tale's protagonist and the inhabitants of a neighboring island.

Uṣaybiʿa's history of physicians, do not mention him. Much of what we do know comes from about a century after his lifetime.[138] Ibn al-Nafīs's times were ones of great upheaval in the Muslim world, particularly in the East, as Baghdad fell in 1258 to the Mongols. He died in Cairo in 1288. Both his birth and resting place, Damascus and Cairo respectively, became intellectual centers of the Muslim world during those years. While seemingly averse to *falsafa* and *kalām*, Ibn al-Nafīs studied medicine, logic, and religious sciences in Damascus. Later he moved to Cairo where he became chief physician of Egypt and personal physician of sultan Baybars I. There he spent his life teaching and practicing medicine, as well as training students in law and grammar.[139]

The work of interest to this chapter is known officially as *al-Risālat al-Kāmiliyya fil-sīra al-nabawiyya* (*The Treatise relating to Kāmil on the Life-History of the Prophet*) but it is often simply referred to by the name of its narrator, *Risāla Fāḍil ibn Nāṭiq* (*The Treatise of the Virtuous Son of the Rational*).[140] The latter title throws into relief the clear connection of this tale to Ibn Ṭufayl's and Ibn Sīnā's *Hayy ibn Yaqẓān*. The work is curiously styled as Ibn al-Nafīs's redaction of an account of the life of Kāmil ('Perfect') as originally told by the narrator, Fāḍil ibn Nāṭiq ('the

[138] As frequently noted, al-ʿUmarī and al-Ṣafadī give us some idea of his life and literary output. Nahyan Fancy additionally points out that his portrayal in these sources is distinctively positive, a champion of orthodoxy (*Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt: Ibn al-Nafīs, Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 22-24).

[139] Long ignored, Ibn al-Nafīs has begun to receive due attention for his theory of the lesser or pulmonary circulation of blood. Yet we also ought to note his general literary output, which, besides multiple medical works, included commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Organon.* Contemporary readers such as Fancy thus see Ibn al-Nafīs as someone who truly straddled the sciences of his time and defies any simplistic constructions of their inherent incompatibility: close to Greek thought in his medical expertise, he also represented and furthered traditional education through his practice of law. While a courtly physician like Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn al-Nafīs's double role makes him a prime case study against too easy divisions in Islamic thought: "There were more options available to medieval Islamic scholars than simply choosing reason over revelation, or vice versa. Ibn al-Nafīs is an example of a medieval scholar who tries to remain faithful to the sources of reason and revelation in his own unique way" ("Pulmonary Transitions and Bodily Resurrection: The Interaction of Medicine, Philosophy, and Religion in the works of ibn al-Nafīs (d.1288)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2006), 36; see also: *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt*, 34f).

[140] All English quotations, unless indicated otherwise, follow Max Meyerhof and Joseph Schacht's translation of the tale in *The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

Virtuous the Son of the Rational'). And while the figure of Ḥayy is clearly absent, the broad framework of the story cannot but invoke the Ṭufaylian account: a man born on an island sets out to explore the world around him from his own senses to the heavenly spheres in a solitary process of education and discovery. Later he encounters other humans and travels with them to a larger society. While there immediately appears to be a close correspondence in the overall structure, Ibn al-Nafīs's tale is as obviously dissimilar as it is similar to *Ḥayy.* The protagonists are very differently created and described, the role of the outsiders and their society for Kāmil is directly opposed to that of Absāl and the islanders for Ḥayy, and the kind of knowledge either discovers is far from the same. Parveen Hasanali argues that Ibn al-Nafīs departs from his predecessors consciously and quite explicitly "in order to establish his primary thesis of the necessity of the prophet as messenger between God and humanity."[141] Most importantly, the overall message of the two works, as we shall see, could not be more different: as we learn from Fāḍil's retelling of Kāmi's life, humanity needs prophets, ought to be living in society, and above all depends on the law to know anything about God. To Hasanali, the work is thus "a polemical reaction to Ibn Ṭufayl's narrative," seeking to "protect the rank of the prophet, which may supposedly have ben endangered by Ibn Ṭufayl's narrative."[142] This seems to be a credible reading of Ibn al-Nafīs' work and it explains both the absence of *Ḥayy* from much of Islamic thought and the close relation between the two tales. In what follows I will explore in what ways Ibn al-Nafīs's work reacts to and corrects the Ṭufaylian narrative and what that might tell us about the particular shape of both accounts, the role of *fiṭra,* and the reception of *Ḥayy*.

[141] Parveen Hasanali, "Texts, Translators, Transmissions: *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and its Reception in Muslim, Judaic, and Christian Milieux" (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1995), 109f.
[142] Ibid., 120.

The *risāla* has four parts (*fann*) of varying length and only some will concern us here. The first explains "how this man called Kāmil came to be formed and how he came to know the (natural) sciences and the missions of the prophets;" the second details "how he came to know the life-story of the Prophet;" the third focuses on "how he came to know the ordinances of religious Law;" and the fourth explicates "how he came to know the happenings which will take place after the death of the Last of the Prophets."[143] Yet the introduction makes clear that what we are given is only part of the account of Fāḍil and that Ibn al-Nafīs merely chose those parts that concern 'the prophetic way of life and religious laws.'[144] This introductory comment already foreshadows the primary concern of the work. While the very last part is by far the most original and substantial aspect, the first is important for our purposes, because this is where we find the greatest parallels to Ibn Ṭufayl's work: a human being spontaneously generates and sets out to discover the world through speculation and dissection. This first *fann* is again divided into three sections: the first dealing with Kāmil's formation, the second with his process of learning or the acquisition of wisdom, and the third examining how he came to learn of the prophets—the gateway to the rest of the work.[145] As the reader will quickly notice, the basic division of this first part cannot but remind us of the structure of Ḥayy's education.

[143] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 38.
[144] See also Musin Mahdi, "Remarks on the 'Theologus Autodidactus' of Ibn al-Nafīs," *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970): 199.
[145] After having reasoned his way to the need for prophets as well as the seal of prophecy, the rest of the work continues in the fashion of reasoned necessity encountered earlier. The third part of the work focuses on the life and character of that seal, his religious practices, and the structure of social life and why they had to be exactly as they are. The final part is a vision for the history of the Muslim community after the prophet's death, including the last days, as again exactly according to reasoned necessity. See also a short summary of the work by Meyerhof and Schacht: "In this intellectual tour de force, which was already admired by his contemporaries, Ibn al-Nafīs set out to show, by abstract reasoning which he put into the mouth of a solitary person, called Kāmil, on a desert island, that the events in the life of the Prophet and in the history of the community of Muslims, including the incursion of the Mongols in his own lifetime and even the physical appearance of the Muslim ruler, no doubt sultan Baybars, were the best things that could possibly have happened and therefore, under divine providence, unavoidable. He ends with a naturalistic explanation of the Last Things" (Max Meyerhof and Joseph Schacht, "Ibn al-Nafīs," in *EI TWO*).

Yet what immediately appear to be parallels to *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* in this first part are tempting but potentially misleading. For the divergences of the two accounts are just as apparent.[146] For one, Ibn al-Nafīs goes out of his way to emphasize the uniqueness of Kāmil's creation and nature. Unlike the uncertainty mentioned in the previous chapter when it comes to the representational nature of Ḥayy, who on one account could have been born like any other human, Kāmil is described as "different from a man formed in the womb in several respects."[147] Like a "chicken in the egg,"[148] he was created in a cave; unlike others, he had "a very big body;"[149] and he was able to subsist on and grow by what he found in the cave.[150] As a result, he left the cave as a "youth of ten or twelve years in his movements and his perception" and thus utterly unlike "the man who is formed in the womb."[151] The protagonist is thus a good bit older than Ḥayy and of exceptional physique. Moreover, there is no second, natural birth narrative as in the Ṭufaylian case. Rather, Ibn al-Nafīs strongly emphasizes the idea of hatching, describing how Kāmil pierced the entrance of the cave, emerging into the world. Thus, while the basic idea appears shared in the tale, relating the life of a man born unto nature on an island, the birth account is clearly different from Ibn Ṭufayl's. And the significance seems to be some form of distance from normal human creation since Kāmil is so clearly hatched as a grown, particularly large, and unnaturally conceived individual.[152]

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[146] As Parveen Hasanali has put it, "even the parallel incidents in the two narratives are used to refute all the notions suggested by Ibn Ṭufayl" ("Texts, Translators, Transmissions," 119).
[147] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 40.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Griffel believes that this cave is a reference to Ibrahim's discovery of monotheism in *sura* 6: 75-79 (*al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 246f).
[151] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 40.
[152] This raises the question of how representational the work is meant to be. Why does Ibn al-Nafīs seek to emphasize so strongly the dissimilarity of his protagonist if clearly what he seeks to refute through the figure of Kāmil are Ibn Ṭufayl's claims regarding human abilities outside of society?

The second section has Kāmil discover his senses by encountering the world on the island and it is here that the overlaps with Ibn Ṭufayl's account are greatest. One by one, the protagonist tests the external limbs and quickly desires to see the internal, leading him to dissections of dead animals and those "of which he could get hold."[153] Besides a number of detailed descriptions of the types of animals and their character, plants and fruit, much attention focuses on the inner organs and their functions, clearly reflecting Ibn al-Nafīs's own medical interest and training. Convergence with Ḥayy is strong in claims such as the fact that "all parts of the animals and plants exist for certain purposes and uses, and that nothing of them is superfluous and useless"[154] just as the skin of fruit or the system of pollination. Moreover, Kāmil even moves his gaze up to meteorology and the celestial bodies by the time of puberty. There seem to be strong Ṭufaylian overtones as the narrator tells us of the "strength of his mind" (*quwwat 'aqlihi*) and the "earnestness of his thinking" (*jād fikrihi*) at the time that the protagonist begins to reflect on the existence of these bodies, how they exist and subsist and who brought them into existence.[155] In a very quick move, Kāmil comes to believe that "these beings must necessarily have a cause for their existence which is necessarily existent, and this is Allah."[156] He is the one who exists by necessity and "knows everything, and takes care of everything."[157] While this second section is much shorter than its parallel parts in *Ḥayy,* we might see broad overlaps in the way in which the protagonist sets out to discover the world around him, moving from his own body to the heavenly bodies, and finally even discovering the existence of God.

However, this seemingly clear overlap comes to an abrupt halt. For the crucial difference with Ibn Ṭufayl and his *Ḥayy* occurs when Kāmil reaches speculative knowledge. For exactly as

[153] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 41.
[154] Ibid., 43.
[155] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 44.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

Kāmil discovers God and, in parallel to Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy, might now start to develop theological thoughts, outsiders arrive and take over his religious education. As Ibn al-Nafīs puts it, when Kāmil "desired to know what are the claims of the Creator on His servants" and when he pondered, "whether it was convenient that the Creator should be worshipped and obeyed,"[158] the winds blow a ship full of merchants on the island. The travelers are forced to stay on the island for a short while to repair their boat and set out to find food and other provisions. As with Ḥayy and Absāl, the first encounter between the ordinary humans and the tale's protagonist is fraught as the merchants fear Kāmil's size and he flees from them. However, eventually they reconcile as they throw him bread and, tasting it, "he found it very good because he had never eaten prepared food before."[159] Thus they do become friendly and Kāmil learns their language. While the encounter between Ḥayy and Absāl is already quite terse, this section of Kāmil's life is contained in one paragraph. After first communications he learns of the existence of cities and their food and "he desired to travel with them."[160] Thus, rather than allow Kāmil to follow the upward progression he had begun in what appeared the strongest parallel to Ḥayy, Ibn al-Nafīs introduces outsiders at the exact moment of his potential spiritual progress. There is no *theologus autodidactus*, there is a naturally formed human who receives other human teachers at the moment he begins to stir above scientific discovery and an innocent exploration of creatures and their bodies.[161]

It is then fitting that rather than an intrusion into Ḥayy's contemplative existence, the outsiders are welcome, offering some pleasurable change and ultimately show Kāmil the

[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid., 45. Note the difference to Ḥayy, who also liked the taste of Absāl's food but feels guilty for tasting it.
[160] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 45.
[161] Hasanali argues well that the idea of the *theologus autodidactus* is a European projection, seeking affirmation for Enlightenment projects ("Texts, Translators, and Transmissions," 106). However, we ought to note that Kāmil does discover the existence of God and the fact that he is omniscient and omnipotent. This is no small feat, yet as the two accounts in parallel make clear, it is crucial for Ibn al-Nafīs that after this discovery, society does and must take over Kāmil's theological education.

importance of sociality. Thus, instead of having discovered fire or even clothing himself, it is the merchants that 'civilize' Kāmil, who in turn welcomes their tasty food and is "pleased with them."[162] Similarly, when he has reached a nearby city with the merchants, Kāmil again eats their food and wears their clothes and "it gave him enormous pleasure."[163] He is not repulsed by their pleasures, tempted by their lowly lives or seeking to teach the outside world; instead Kāmil at this point "remembered how miserable his life had been because he was always naked in cold and heat, and had to confine himself to natural foodstuffs, and the animals always attacked him and bit him."[164] The realization that life in society is pleasurable, from food to clothing and safety, then prompts Kāmil to reflect. He suddenly knows that

> Man, because he was lacking a natural weapon and needed artificial food and artificial clothes, could not live well if he was alone, but that man was in need of being social, so that he could be with a community some members of which sowed, others ploughed, others made bread, others transported things, others sewed clothes and so on.[165]

The idea so natural to *Ḥayy*, that a human being alone can care for himself, protect, and nourish himself Ibn al-Nafīs explicitly denies from the physical standpoint. Instead, it is society that allows for the human being's fulfilment (through its food and shelter as well as its direction by revealed religion and law).

In line with this reading of society as necessary to human existence, Kāmil argues next that since man "is in need of all this in order to live well, he is, no doubt, in need of concluding contracts such as sale, hire, and so on."[166] And since disputes are bound to arise in such a set-up, "man can live well only if he is with a community who keep between them a law by which all disputes are settled."[167] This means, in a first step, that law is not some concession made to the masses but

[162] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 45.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid. This, of course is a claim all three of the authors of this dissertation could agree on, safe Ibn Ṭufayl.
[166] ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 45.
[167] Ibid.

essential to human sociality and thus to human existence. Now such a law can only work "if it is met with obedience and acceptance" and that in turn is only possible "if it emanates from a person whom they regard as truthful when he informs them that it comes from Allah."[168] Thus, from his own needs for shelter has arisen the need for law as well as a human messenger, a being neither animal nor divine but accessible to all.[169]

ii) A corrective to the weeds and Ḥayy

Now while Kāmil spends the third section of the first *fann* rationalizing the existence of prophets and the need for a seal of the prophets, it is important to highlight that overall, he does little by way of speculation, philosophically or theologically, and certainly not mystically. Going by volume, the work is a meditation on the political formations of Islamic civilization at the time

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[168] Ibid.

[169] From his own happiness in sociality, Kāmil comes to ponder the qualities of the prophetic transmitter of Allah's will as well as the necessity of a prophet and prophets more broadly. Thus, he needs to "perform miracles by which the soul knows that what he brings is not a lie and not vain, but is truth from Allah" (ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 46). And a person who does such things is a prophet, he concludes. The narrator hence informs us that "Kāmil knew that the good life of man becomes completely through the existence of this prophet, and his existence is a great good for man and of general benefit" (ibid.). Now since he is of such great benefit, the existence of the prophet is necessary (*wājib*): "it is unthinkable that Allah should have omitted to create this prophet although he is of general benefit" (ibid.). Ibn al-Nafīs in this context also invokes the idea of *lā budda minhu* to underline the necessity of a prophet by logic (NB: on the idea that this is some sort of Mu'tazili idea of necessity see Meyerhof and Schacht, *The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs,* 32f; Fancy strongly disagrees with this). In addition to his broad necessity, Kāmil also reflects on the role of the prophet and finds it threefold: to transmit the divine law, to spread knowledge of God's attributes among humankind, and to inform them of the resurrection and the afterlife. Now since these are all things "accepted only with difficulty by the natures of many people," (ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 47) a single prophet would not have been enough: "Had not men in our time become acquainted with the precepts of the law, and accustomed to its doctrines, they would at once disapprove of it and disbelieve the prophets" (ibid.). Hence, there must have been a succession of messengers, each revealing the part "most easily accepted and most urgently needed for the preservation and the good life of mankind, namely the transmission of Allah's law to men" (ibid.). Over time then each gave more than the previous "until the law which is needed is completed" (ibid.). Once this state has been reached people know their God to some degree and have come to "realize His perfect power, it is not difficult for them to believe the description of the life to come and the eternal happiness and unhappiness which it brings with it" (ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 47). In this way, the dissemination of even the hard truths is secured through a successive and progressive revelation of God's will and qualities. Kāmil has reached the recognition that there must be a chain of prophets such that each build upon the previous and prepares for the next (cf. ibid., 47f). The final aspect in this chain of reasoning is the recognition that the last of the prophets "must be the most excellent of them" (ibid., 48) since he must know and reveal "all that his predecessors had revealed" (ibid.). He is the one who completes the series and teaches everything there is to teach since he is the last of those who speak to humankind about their Creator and His demands. The third part of the work focuses on religious obligations from the prophet and knowledge of Allah and the afterlife. Kāmil comes to deduce things like the need for a just ordering of society, including punishment for crimes and special taxes (cf. ET in Meyerhof and Schacht, 60-3).

since all other parts (the first aside) focus on this topic. Thus, we may note that the desire to travel with the merchants is in no way spiritual or about truth. Unlike the case of Ḥayy, there is no sense that Kāmil knows things about the world, God, ultimate truth that others might not have accessed or fully seen. Rather, he is the one in need of information, food, clothing, and his journey is thus one of discovery for him. As Muhsin Mahdi puts it,"Virtuous son of Rational had failed to explain what is knowable to man as man and succeed in explaining what most men consider beyond the power of unaided reason."[170] In this vein, many have noted the clear absence of the mystical aspects so dominant in *Ḥayy.*[171] Instead, as Fancy has pointed out, the work is about what all Muslims know[172] and which the work summarizes as "the life-story of the Prophet and the ordinances of religious law [*al-sunan al-sharʿiyya*]."[173] The point of all of this, Fancy notes, is to make "a subtle point about how little the natural world can reveal about the divine, spiritual world."[174] Thus, it is when he begins to ponder God, that other humans arrive and take him to society. And it is only there that he returns to these issues. Yet rather than speculate, he rationalizes what he has been told and finds it reasonable (and not the other way around). The use of *lā budda wa-anna* underlines how rational and logical all these religious truths he has learnt really are. Instead of a logical necessity, we see a form of *a posteriori* rationality that, as Fancy notes, shows how "a person who believes in the literal details of the biography of the Prophet cannot be considered anything but

[170] Musin Mahdi, "Remarks on the 'Theologus Autodidactus' of Ibn al-Nafīs," 205.
[171] See especially Meyerhof and Schacht in their introduction to *The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs,* 32f. According to Kruk the dropping out of the mystical element is a side-effect of the broader dismissal of Platonic thought in Ibn al-Nafīs's work ("Neoplatonism and After: From Ibn Ṭufayl to Ibn al- Nafīs," in *The Neoplatonic Tradition: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Themes,* ed. Arie Vanderjagt and Detlev Patzold (Köln: Dinter, 1991), 82f).
[172] Cf. "The Virtuous Son of the Rational: A Traditionalist's Response to the *Falāsifa,*" in *Avicenna and His Legacy,* ed. Zvi Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols 2009), 223.
[173] Meyerhof and Schacht, *The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs*, 38.
[174] "The Virtuous Son of the Rational: A Traditionalist's Response to the *Falāsifa,*" 227.

rational."[175] Rather than separating Kāmil, the exceptional, from the masses, it is in human sociality that he finds fulfilment—just like anybody else.

On the question of human sociality and sociability, the tale about Kāmil emphasizes the idea of man as a political animal that al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd can also agree with. For Ibn al-Nafīs there is no place for an autodidactic journey of discovery. Hasanali summarizes this aptly when she writes that in "Ibn al-Nafīs's treatise, the social aspect is extolled just as individual solitude is preferred in the Ṭufaylian narrative." [176] In contrast with the Ṭufaylian suggestion that exceptional individuals such as Ḥayy could and potentially must seek their fulfilment in solitude, the main thesis here is that man needs society to be happy since it shows him true happiness and supports all his needs. This, in turn, as we saw, also means that he needs the law to order affairs, prophecy to anchor that law, and the political configurations presented in the work. There is no doubt that for the author of this tale any human being, even the unusually conceived Kāmil, is in need of revelation and society. Not merely rationally, even purely by physical comfort human sociality is the appropriate context for humanity.[177]

In line with religion's essential rationality, Ibn al-Nafīs's *Risala* posits a human being's desire to live in society and thus also the need for legal structure.[178] This account of the importance

[175] Ibid., 234. As he notes, "all subsequent religious inquiry, whether into the nature of the laws, the attributes of God, or the nature of the afterlife, must proceed by taking into account both reason and revelation. That is, either the enquiry proceeds with truths explicit in Scripture that are then *post facto* shown to be rational, for example the biography of the Prophet, the religious laws, and so on; or, it proceeds with Scripture providing enough hints so that the rational elite can extract from its symbols and metaphors the underlying truths" (ibid., 232).
[176] "Text, Translators, Transmissions," 119.
[177] Lenn Goodman sees *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* overall as "anti-social" (*Ibn Tufayl's* Hayy ibn Yaqzān, trans. Lenn E. Goodman (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2009),73). As he argues, "the resolution of Ibn Ṭufayl's thought-experiment, which finds the soul of man to be essentially good and ultimately perfectible, if only society let him alone, implies a positive value in extrication of the individual from society" (ibid., 72f). W. Montgomery Watt connects the anti-social tendencies of Ibn Ṭufayl to the political situation under the Almohads (cf. "Philosophy and Theology under the Almohads," in *Actas primer congreso de estudios arabes e islamicos* (Madrid: Comite Permanente del Congreso de Estudios Arabes e Islamicos, 1964), 101-108).
[178] On the question of *Ḥayy* as a stumbling block see again Nadja Germann, who claims that his unusual views are the source of the work's "rather limited impact on Eastern thought" ("Philosophizing without Philosophy," *Recherches de Theologie et Philosophie Medievales* 75, no. 2 (2008): 301).

of society seems to be in contrast with Ibn Ṭufayl's account, in which, as Goodman puts it, "a human mind can think its way clear of its surround"[179] and thus challenges the idea of humanity as a creature of society, as well as, question the universality of the prophet's message. Put differently, *Ḥayy* argues that neither sociality nor its law nor religion is absolutely necessary or constitutive for human fulfilment per se, though they might still be beneficial for all and certainly appropriate for most.[180] Ibn al-Nafīs appears to dispel any doubts as to the universality of the messenger, making his exceptional protagonist a creature longing for the social and depending on it for happiness and insight. We might say Ibn al-Nafīs's tale has corrected the impression that there is such a thing as a happy, fulfilled solitary sage that reached all the heights necessary and desired by himself.[181] I agree with Hasanali here that the story of Kāmil seeks to contribute to a "larger discussion of prophecy, revealed law and the functions of the prophets" and as such distances itself from the readings of Ibn Ṭufayl on these matters.[182]

It is important to highlight how the protagonist, Kāmil, by name and nature presents a more traditional, theological picture than the figure at the center of Ibn Ṭufayl's or Ibn Sīnā's work. [183]

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[179] *Ibn Ṭufayl's* Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, xvi.

[180] As such the work is not a pragmatic guide, Goodman believes, but a proposal for the importance of a spiritual life to humanity. *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* teaches that there is benefit in solitude because "there is something blotted out in man when society devours his every waking moment: the apotheosis of society is the death of the transcendent soul" (*Ibn Tufayl's* Hayy ibn Yaqzān, 91). For him "it was the ideal of that withdrawal embodied in the peaceful soul of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān which Ibn Ṭufayl singled out for praise" (ibid.). For Goodman the possibility of such an argument has much to do with what he sees as the leniency of Ibn Ṭufayl's patron. It was briefly possible to claim that law and religion are just one way of approaching the truth, meaning "the picture of traditional Islam presented by *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* is simply that of mass religion, as seen from the heights of rational mysticism" (ibid., 48).

[181] A claim that, as we will see in chapter 6, Ibn Rushd would also want to deny—though not in the form of a tale.

[182] Hasanali, "Texts, Translators, Transmissions," 117.

[183] On the idea of *al-insān al-kāmil* see Roger Arnaldez, "al-Insān al-Kāmil," in *EI TWO.* He highlights the mystical and gnostic connections of this concept and the fact that its origin is to be seen more in Greek than Qur'anic precedents. Yet he also notes that in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's commentary the perfect man is mentioned and described as the being that perceives both the particulars and the universals; and he also points to the importance of this notion for Ibn ʿArabī (Reynold Nicholson's entry in on al-Insān al-Kāmil in *EI ONE* focuses especially on Ibn ʿArabī). See also Hans Heinrich Schaeder, "Die Islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen, Ihre Herkunft und Ihre Dichterische Gestaltung" (*ZDMG* 79, no. 3/4 (1925): 192-268) for a slightly dated attempt to trace the pre-Islamic sources of this idea.

As the name indicates, Kāmil is an uncommon man in more than one respect: tall in size and great in intellect. He is not born an infant or raised by a gazelle and hence never nurtured by nature itself. And, as noted above, he does not actually discover much, learning about clothes and food and fire from merchants. The incursion of others does not confirm his separately won knowledge but rather shows him what he needs. The impression that this work is a conscious counter-effort is also already present in Ṣafadī who summarizes *The Treatise* and Ibn al-Nafīs's intentions in the following way: "He defends the system of Islam and the Muslims' doctrines on the missions of Prophets, the religious laws, and the resurrection of the body, and the transitoriness of the world."[184] He is no hermit or sage, no self-raised philosopher enjoying mystical fulfilment, but a perfect human being who finds his greatest happiness in society.

The idea that Ibn al-Nafīs's tale seeks to address some of the things perceived as potentially un-orthodox in Ibn Ṭufayl receives further support from his choice of narrator. Following the suggestions of early scholars such as Meyerhof and Schacht, Fancy sees a direct attack on the Ṭufaylian work in the title. The idea of the *fāḍil* (or virtuous) Ibn Nāṭiq (rational) is a response to the Ṭufaylian description of the masses as *ahl al-faḍl,* who are virtuous but not better than animals. In contrast, Ibn al-Nafīs wants to show, Fancy believes, that "virtuous, religious masses (*ahl al-faḍl*) of Ibn Ṭufayl's island are not irrational but rational for believing in exoteric scripture."[185] As a result he declares the work "one long argument" opposing the Ṭufaylian idea that "traditionalism is irrational."[186] The purpose of the work is thus to refute (in the title and, as we saw, in the choice of protagonist and the development of the story) what

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On a different note, Schacht thinks that "both books go, essentially, against normal, orthodox Islamic doctrine" with the idea of spontaneous generation and the ascent of the unaided human being (*The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs*, 30).

[184] Cited in Meyehof and Schacht, *The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs*, 36.

[185] "The Virtuous Son of the Rational," 226f.

[186] Ibid.

the author seems to take as a central claim of the Ṭufaylian narrative: that most men are not better than irrational animals and that the religious life is a possible but potentially lesser way of relating to the truth. Ibn al-Nafīs, it seems, set out to show that "those who cling to the literal word of revelation are also being rational." That, Fancy believes, is "the entire purpose of Ibn al-Nafīs's treatise."[187] It is then wrong to say that the work is about a *theologus autodidactus,* given that its protagonist never discovers anything apart from God's existence. Rather than an ode to independent reason (theological or otherwise), we see a man who after the fact rationalizes what he learns from society. This, in turn, shows that rather than being a cheap or lesser consolation prize to the masses, "exoteric revelation is itself rational and, consequently, should be accepted within the confines of a demonstrative, philosophical argument."[188] The exceptional Kāmil turns out to be actually quite ordinary, seeking what all those born naturally already have.

iii) The politics of *fiṭra* for Ibn al-Nafīs

Considering all of this, it is most important for my purposes that Ibn al-Nafīs does not use *fiṭra* and does not admit a gulf between the elite and the masses. His emphasis appears to be a different one; namely, to present awareness of God as natural to *all* human beings and Islam as rational to them—including the most perfect.[189] Additionally, as the encounter with other humans showed, even the most exceptional human beings needs sociality for his education and

[187] "The Virtuous Son of the Rational," 226.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Though, as we will see in my last chapter, Ibn Rushd was able to affirm both: the availability of basic theological insights for all and a gulf of *fiṭar* that separated people. However, unlike Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd did not believe in the necessity or benefit of isolating the exceptional from the masses.

happiness.[190] Now, while relevant for an appreciation of the story of Kāmil itself, this recognition also has important consequences for my argument regarding the significance of *fiṭra* in Ibn Ṭufayl's work. For a consciously theological response like Ibn al-Nafīs' does not appear interested in the term or convinced of its relevance. Additionally, the philosophical concerns and abilities of the Ṭufaylian protagonist are completely absent. Both these facts—no direct naming of *fiṭra* and avoiding the content related to it in his predecessor—support the corrective intentions of Ibn al-Nafīs and the controversy Ibn Ṭufayl appears to have stirred. Clearly, already by Ibn al-Nafīs's time, Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy* was read as an argument in favor of the existence of intellectual elites, proclaiming the power of reason and demoting the status of religious revelation. And as the avoidance of the term seems to indicate, *fiṭra* was central to these debates. In fact, as we will see in chapter 7, already Ibn Ṭufayl's successor at the court, Ibn Rushd, would disagree with his conception of *fiṭra.* While I am in no position to evaluate the influence Ibn Rushd might have had on Ibn al-Nafīs, we will see that Ibn Rushd disagreed with Ibn Ṭufayl's conception regarding the sufficiency of an exceptional *fiṭra* for some.

Thus, despite the pacifying reading I will suggest in the next chapter, Ibn Ṭufayl's tale seems to have caused a stir. As Christoph Bürgel notes, many amongst the orthodox were probably outraged by "the mystic's (as well as the philosopher's) arrogance, his alleged superior spirituality, and the condescending or even contemptuous outlook toward the *sharīʾa*."[191]And one reaction

[190]According to Remke Kruk, *fiṭra* thus forms a religiously colored backdrop to a narrative seeking to solidify what we might describe as a traditional conception of what kind of knowledge is available to human beings before or outside of revelation. The basic argument of the work is thus that "the Muslim concept of *fiṭra,* inborn feeling for religious truth, [is] supposed to be identical with Islam. For this purpose, Ibn al-Nafīs availed himself of Ibn Ṭufayl's story" ("Neoplatonists and After," 81). As my summary indicated, despite never using the term so present in Ibn Ṭufayl's tale, discussion of the detailed beliefs and injunctions of Islam dominate the work. Thus, Kruk argues that in his work Ibn al-Nafīs "set forth the basic tenets of the Islamic faith and the fact that the realization of their truth as well as of the inevitability of the historical development to which they pertain is ingrained in human nature" ("Neoplatonists and After," 81).

[191] Christoph Bürgel, "'Symbols and Hints:' Some Considerations concerning the Meaning of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzan,"* in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl,* ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 129. This, of course,

seems to have been the Nafīsian tale that seeks theological and scientific relevance over the mystical or the naturalistic. According to Schacht, such a reading of the history of *Ḥayy's* reception explains their different goals. While Ibn Ṭufayl seeks to show "the fundamental accord between traditional religion, fit for the masses, and philosophical mysticism, reserved for the elite,"[192] Ibn al-Nafīs "intends to prove not only, in the first place, the reasonableness of the main tenets of Islamic religious sciences, but also the appropriateness of the historical incidents in the life of the Prophet, and of the history and the actual situation of the [Muslim] community."[193] This supports our impression that Ibn al-Nafīs turns Ibn Bājja's and Ibn Ṭufayl's arguments regarding isolation and the possibility of happiness on their head, denying the salutary power of solitude and answering the open question of the universality of revealed religion in a strong affirmative. Given the reading of *fiṭra* as pointing to a gulf amongst humans in the writings of both our Andalusians, the conscious omission of the term and its indirect reinterpretation (through Kāmil discovering God by himself but then immediately receiving assistance from those whom revelation had already reached) make a lot of sense. There are no human beings that on the basis of a distinct intellectual capacity can reason their way through the universe and meditate up to its highest secrets. Instead, even the most exceptional creature receives the much needed and welcome message of revelation and comfort of society through others.

The reason for Ibn al-Nafīs's avoidance of *fiṭra* and rereading of the islander's relation to revelation and society in his account of Kāmil's life, despite the clear response to Ibn Ṭufayl and his narrative, becomes even clearer if we turn to a different work of his. His *Sharh al-wurayqāt fīl-*

presupposes they read it and the tale did not remain mainly limited to its court context. At the very least Ibn al-Nafīs knew it.

[192] *The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs*, 32.

[193] Ibid.

mantiq[194] is both a commentary on his own work, *Kitāb al-wurayqāt,* and a summary of Aristotle's *Organon* and the *Rhetoric*.[195] Brief discussions of things *fiṭri* (not *fiṭra* itself) occur twice at the beginning of this work. And both instances are equally dismissive and skeptical. In the very first chapter (*faṣl*) on the need for logic (*al-hāja ila al-mantiq*), Ibn al-Nafīs argues that the differentiation between true and false knowledge is not *fiṭri* but rather acquired. And the tool by which such distinctions are made is logic, as the title of the chapter indicates. In the third *faṣl* he makes clear that logic is necessary because in *fiṭri* reasoning alone too many mistakes occur. Both of these underline what, without reference to *fiṭra*, has become clear from our discussion of the two tales: it is not in humanity's natural state that true knowledge can be gained. Acquired tools are necessary to differentiate the truth from falsehood, just as Kāmil needed the assistance of society to reach full flourishing.[196]

The context for both these references is Ibn al-Nafīs's understanding of knowledge, which is achieved through either forming a concept (*taṣawwur*) or assent (*taṣdīq*); and as such either acquired (*muktasab)* or *fiṭri.* About the *fiṭri* parts, i.e. the ones that are not acquired, he argues in the first chapter that they are "very small, not to be reached fully and not to be relied upon" ("*wa al-fiṭri minhumā shay'un nazrun lā yuhsalu bihi kamālun yu'taddu bihi"*).[197] So for one, what is *fiṭri* for Ibn al-Nafīs is both limited and subject to error. This alone explains the very limited interest in the term and also the different kind of story we have seen above, during which Kāmil by himself discovers very little that might fall under the rubric of truth. This is in contrast to the acquired knowledge, which the prophet has brought. What is most crucial for us is the claim that what

[194] References are to the following edition: *Charh al-wurayqāt fīl-mantiq,* ed. ʿAmmār Ṭālibī (Tunis, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2009).
[195] See *The* Theologus Autodidactus *of Ibn al-Nafīs*, 27 for a brief reference to the work.
[196] In this dismissmal of *fiṭra*'s contribution to logic, too, we can see an agreement with Ibn Rushd (whose stance on this I will discuss in more detail in chapter 6).
[197] *Charh al-wurayqāt fīl-mantiq*, 6.

differentiates between the truth and falsehood is logic, and not any natural abilities. When it comes to the other option, acquired knowledge (*muktasab),* we learn that this comes from the messenger of God; yet since here too confusion can occur, tools (such as *qiyās*) are necessary. Now the application and processing of the various information can have many mistakes built in, which makes discerning the truth hard. What is crucial for us is that according to Ibn al-Nafīs "the differentiation between the truth […] and the falsehood is not *fitri* or else every rational person would arrive at in and there would be no disagreements. Rather it is acquired. A differentiation does not occur but rather it is acquired. And the science which differentiates between them is logic."[198] It is an acquired quality, logic, that allows for the differentiation of knowledge and not any 'natural' ideas as we might have thought in the case of Ḥayy.[199] This again, fits in well with Kāmil's life, who was taught the important things through contact with society and with the help of the prophet.

The second reference to *fiṭri* knowledge in the third *faṣl,* titled "On Doubts and their Dissolution*,"* affirms this reading. Here Ibn al-Nafīs raises a number of potential doubts and answers them. The second concerns logic and he wonders whether it is acquired (*muktasab)* or *fiṭri.* The idea that logic could be entirely *fiṭri* is immediately rejected (even before he gets to the proper answer section), simply because so many mistakes occur (*ghuliṭa fīhi kathīran*). In the answer, he then explains that the danger of a mistake occurring in the *fiṭri* necessitates other avenues for theorizing: "if there occurred in the part of theorizing that is logic a mistake, then the *fiṭri* part would not notice it."[200] Instead, there are many other ways of acquiring and arriving at the

[198]*Charh al-wurayqāt fīl-mantiq*, 7.
[199] We may note that the claim that logic is acquired does not necessarily go against Ibn Ṭufayl's idea of *fiṭra*. A particularly well developed *fiṭra* might mean that somebody can either very quickly or solely by themselves acquire the basics of logic. That person would not be born with logical knowledge but would have acquired it on the basis of their exceptional *fiṭra.* Yet these arguments go, to some extent, against al-Fārābī's understanding of the first principles as discussed in chapter 2.
[200] *Charh al-wurayqāt fīl-mantiq,* 9.

necessary truths, he claims. We thus see again the continuation with, or direct spelling out of, ideas we could see both in the first occurrence and Kāmil's life-story more broadly. Whatever exactly *fiṭri* is, it is not enough, because it is so prone to mistakes. Acquired ways of knowledge are superior, especially since they involve the prophet. This dovetails with the central departure noticed in the tale: when it came to speculation about God, the protagonist was provided with a social context and its experience of the divine messenger. In stark contrast with Ḥayy, we saw that it is exactly only in the community that the human being can flourish. Now, logic did not play a role in the tale explicitly and Ibn al-Nafīs never appears to use the noun (*fiṭra*) so prominent in Ibn Tufayl's work. Yet I believe the implications are clear, given the structural overlap between the two works and the questions they both seem to engage and seek to answer. The Nafīsian tale illustrates what his commentary argues: direction by the prophet and his higher forms of knowledge are not just possible but necessary since by mere upbringing no human being can enjoy his life or reach his fullest potential.

Concluding for now, we can agree with Fancy that Ibn al-Nafīs, in his narrative, sought "to show that exoteric revelation itself is rational and, as such, should not be ruled out of philosophical arguments *a prior*."[201] Yet since there were some things Kāmil did reach by himself, including awareness of God's existence, it is wrong to say that he denies that humanity is capable of certain achievements at its most isolated. Responding to the claims of both Ibn Bājja and the Ṭufaylian tale, he carefully disagrees with its ideas of a gulf of *fiṭar* and instead affirms the dependence of all creatures on the revelation for detailed knowledge of God, the benefits of human sociality as the locus of such revelation, and the crucial importance of the law that follow from both of these. A special human being like Kāmil can know some things, but for theological truths and physical

[201] "The Virtuous Son of the Rational," 220f.

happiness, he depends on society. Ibn al-Nafīs with this argument turns Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy on his head in a crucial way: law and religious ordinances are no longer a concession to society and those of lesser intellect living in it, but rather a natural and desirable aspect of human life, fulfilling the desires of the perfect human being. At the same time, he contends with Ibn Bājja's arguments regarding the happiness of the solitary, arguing that rather than true and possible, the social context is indeed necessary for human knowledge.

It is then not surprising that, despite the shared area of inquiry, we search in vain for any reference to an exceptional *fiṭra,* the idea of *fiṭra* at all, or any doubt regarding the benefits of the messenger. As recourse to his more philosophical commentary has shown, Ibn al-Nafīs in fact did not think highly of the possibility of *fiṭri* knowledge. Instead, as the life of Kāmil powerfully illustrates and underlines, there is a clear *need* in human life and a logical *necessity* in the world for the messenger, his particular life, and the subsequent shape of Islamic civilization. Overall, it thus seems that the notion of *fiṭra*—though still far from a clear definition—related to quite fundamental debates among our thinkers. What the human mind is naturally endowed with intellectually is connected to concerns about the possibility of political change and the role of the exceptional philosopher therein, as well as the more theological concern of the universality of the message of the prophet and the political nature of all or some human beings.

IV. Conclusion

Ibn Bājja's engagement with *fiṭra* and his emphasis on a gulf of *fiṭar* between the exceptional and the lower kinds reflects some of his particular concerns.[202] Chiefly among them,

[202] I am not saying I this is direct political commentary of any kind. As Marmura importantly notes, since we know so little about the lives of either Ibn Bājja or Ibn Ṭufayl, we ought to "exercise caution in reading their writings as a commentary in any specific or concrete fashion on the politics or ideologies of their times" ("The Philosopher and Society," 316f).

as I have shown, was the question of the social and political role of the philosopher. As Ibn Bājja argues, solitude of some form is a good for the exceptional human beings, protecting them from the influence of the masses. Nevertheless, the exceptional—or, as Ibn Bajja thinks of them, the weeds— in some way depend on the imperfect city for their emergence. In fact, they even seem to have a role in the city, slowly changing defective environments by their example. Rather than a full retirement from the life of the polis, it seems that Ibn Bājja suggests a potential for political reform by allowing for both, a possibility of change and a role for the philosopher in that change. The imperfect cities of Ibn Bājja's solitary philosopher do not appear entirely lost. Ibn Ṭufayl, I want to argue, took over the idea of a gulf between different *fiṭar* but radicalized it, as he seems to reject the hope of even the quite well-working society of the islanders to take to Ḥayy's philosophical ideas. Those of deficient divine gift (to take the language appropriate to Ibn Bājja) for the most part cannot (or will not?) change and it is indeed best for both sides if the exceptional philosopher, who is no teacher, separates himself. Containing the political subversion that one might read into Ibn Bājja's account, Ibn Ṭufayl did not foresee a change in the city, though (as we will see in the next chapter) allowed for an elusive a figure as Absāl to move from the masses to the isolated life of the elect. Finally, Ibn al-Nafīs implicitly seemed to respond to the underlying gulf of *fiṭar* as well as explicitly to the question of human sociability and the role of revelation in the life of the exceptionals. In this Ibn al-Nafīs clearly sought to avoid reference to *fiṭra,* engaging rather with the consequences of the idea of an intellectual gulf among the people and hence also the idea of different needs when it comes to revelation and society. While the political importance of the notion of *fiṭra* as a varying (not singular since existing seemingly in at least two types), primarily intellectual concept are thus again plain, it is not clear why exactly Ibn Bājja resorts to this term and what he believes its educability to be (especially given the danger the imperfect city represents for the exceptional philosopher).

What is clear is the *Tadbīr's* assertion that the solitary, being of special status, ought to take great care to preserve that status by whatever form of physical or internal separation is possible or necessary. [203] While seemingly in contrast to the wisdom of previous political philosophy, such a decision against humanity's deep-seated need for sociality does not in fact preclude reaching one's fullest potential, i.e. union with the active intellect. As we saw, basic to these arguments seems to be the notion that there is a deep divide between the exceptional and the masses in terms of *fiṭra* and that this gulf is not only one reason for the need for solitude but also the basis for the philosopher's exceptional status more broadly. With this reading Ibn Bājja not only builds on al-Fārābī's logical and political conception of *fiṭra,* he also offers the building blocks of Ibn Ṭufayl's political use of *fiṭra*. However, the politically muted philosopher of Ibn Ṭufayl appears less silenced in Ibn Bājja. Physical emigration is an option but not a straightforward recommendation. Likened to an amputation, the last resort for a body to survive a severely diseased limb, it is neither natural nor seemingly a straightforward necessity. Rather, Ibn Bājja stresses the naturalness of political life to a human being (even the most exceptional one) and the more general importance of solitude for the protection of the exceptional. Related to that, there is hope for change: those who are exceptional grow up in the imperfect city and ought to protect themselves, yet as their name indicates, bringing about the perfect city might yet be possible. Contrasting their shared vision of *fiṭra* with their slightly differing take on the possibility of political change and the role of the philosopher, we could understand *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* as a radicalized version of the *Tadbīr*. It is to this argument that we must turn next.

[203] We may note that Ibn Bājja pays little attention to the question of revelation or the role of the messenger in the lives of philosophers. The general conception is that while not necessarily hostile to it (which is what Rosenthal argued), Ibn Bājja had little concern for these matters (cf. Leaman, "Ibn Bājja on Society," 112f).

Chapter 5:
An Exceptional Sage and the Need for the Messenger:
The Politics of *Fiṭra* in Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 1185) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*

There is a man for every task and
everyone belongs to the life for which he was created.[1]
Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*

I. Introduction

This chapter investigates the use of *fiṭra* (pl. *fiṭar*) in Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 1185) philosophical tale *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān.* One of Arabic literature's most famous creations and a beloved literary trope of enlightenment thinkers, this account of the life of the exceptional sage Ḥayy makes surprisingly frequent use of our concept. In fact, we will see that at a handful of crucial moments in the story, *fiṭra* appears in a very particular context: to describe the intellectual capacity of different human beings. While the exact conditions of application are not clear, there seem to be larger political consequences of this use. In continuation with what we have seen in the thought of al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja, attention to *fiṭra* in the tale points us to an unbridgeable gulf between the few and the masses that affects their relation within human sociality and the staffing of its religious and political establishment. While the life of Ḥayy suggests that revealed religion might not be universal, the encounter with broader humanity demonstrates that the majority of people are in fact best served by it.[2] The lynchpin of this argument is *fiṭra,* for Ḥayy is said to have an exceptional one by which he is able to rise to intellectual and mystical heights. The people of a neighboring island, however, have a deficient *fiṭra* and they are unable to grasp the truth as Ḥayy has even after

[1] Lenn E. Goodman, *Ibn Ṭufayl's* Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2009), 164. Unless I chose to translate something differently myself, I follow this English translation. The Arabic references are to Léon Gauthier's edition, *Hayy ben Yaqdhān: Roman Philosophique d'Ibn Thofail* (Beirut Imprimerie Catholique,1936).
[2] On the question of Ibn Ṭufayl's neoplatonism see Remke Kruk, "Neoplatonists and After: From Ibn Ṭufayl to Ibn al-Nafīs," in *The Neoplatonic Tradition: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Themes,* eds. Arie Vanderjagt and Detlev Patzold (Köln: Dinter 1991.), 75-85.

his best teaching efforts.[3] While the claims of revealed religion and philosophy appear compatible in theory, the policy recommendation at the end of the tale is one of different paths lived out separately. It is best if the exceptional sage stays away from society in order to not corrupt it, nor be corrupted himself. Attention to *fiṭra* could thus tell us something about Ibn Ṭufayl's motivations in writing this tale for the court. For through it appears Ibn Ṭufayl is responding to a nascent Aristotelian philosophy in Andalusia in two ways: by strongly affirming the masses' need for the messenger and by reducing the philosopher's revolutionary potential since he is both a hermit and a failed teacher.[4] For Ibn Tufayl—unlike for Ibn Bājja—there is no social or political function for the philosopher. *Fiṭra's* use in the context of a varying intellectual capacity in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* thus has surprising implications for the depoliticization of the esoteric philosopher and the importance of the Qurʾānic message to society.

[3] In brief, the tale goes as follows: a child grows up on a remote but ideally tempered island. The narrator offers two birthing accounts, one natural (in which the daughter of a king from a neighboring island places her newborn in a basket and hands it over to the sea) and one on the basis of autogenesis (in which the child is formed out of a bubble under the influence of the sun). In either case, the infant is reared by a doe and the readers follow his physical, intellectual, and spiritual development in increments of seven years. When his foster mother passes away, he dissects her body in search of a cure and thus begins his increasingly upward directed search for life's origin, purpose, and meaning. Eventually Ḥayy comes to reach the divine vision, after years of spiritual exercise. However, the tale does not end with this conjunction, the event reader and protagonist thought to be the ultimate human perfection. In a move highly significant for the overall meaning of the tale, Ḥayy encounters humans and even society. Another seeker of solitude from a neighboring island, Absāl, joins Ḥayy on his island, teaches him to speak, and tells him about human community, the messenger, and the religious prescriptions he brought. Ḥayy is intrigued, seeing the congruence of what he had found to be the truth and the symbolic message of the messenger (implied to be Muḥammad). He takes on the demands he is informed of but, hearing how the people of Absāl's island are concerned with property and other outward practices, desires to tell them about the way of life his solitary existence allowed him. Despite his new friend's warnings as to the islanders' inability to comprehend his findings, the two set sail and join the neighboring island. Here, however, Ḥayy sees his mission fail. Even the most educated of the people are unable to grasp his explanations and rather than thrilled, they become increasingly disgruntled with him. Realizing his mistake and fearing their falling from the religious path God prepared for them, Ḥayy assures them of the appropriateness of their path. With Absāl in tow, he returns to the life of quiet contemplation and mystical union on his own island.

[4] W. Montgomery Watt supports this reading. He writes that the work is "obviously a defense of the position of philosophy in the life of the Almohad state" and notes that what is interesting is "the abandonment of the claim of the earlier philosophers like Farābī that philosophy was necessary for the proper ordering of the state. For Ibn Ṭufayl philosophy is seen to be incapable of directing the lives of the inhabitants of the state. It can lead a few selected individuals to the highest felicity, but to reach this they must retire from active. In other words the *summon bonum* of the philosopher has become mystical ecstasy" (*Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1962), 139).

ʾAbū Bakr Ibn Ṭufayl was at the center of the political life of his time.[5] He was a member of the Almoḥad court and served as chief physician to its ruler, ʾAbū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (d. 1184). *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* is his only extant philosophical work, though there are some pieces of poetry and the claim that he had written on medicine and astronomy. Despite this meagre share in surviving works, Lawrence Conrad has pointed out that, "with the possible exception of *One Thousand and One Nights,* no work from the literary heritage of classical Islam has been published or translated so frequently as Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān.*"[6] Yet as the reference to the Arabic literary heritage already indicates, Ibn Ṭufayl was not a philosopher by training. Rather, he seems to have had a keen interest in what was no easy task at the time in the Western Islamic lands: a slowly spreading philosophical thought (*falsafa*), initiated by towering readers of the Greek tradition, such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037). Ibn Ṭufayl himself bemoans in his introduction the sorry state of *falsafa* around him, fraught with difficulty, especially with respect to training or the availability of materials.[7] Yet the fact that Avicennism was under discussion at all shows how the historical

[5] ʾAbū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭufayl al-Ḳaysī belonged to the prominent Arab tribe of Ḳays. Christian scholastics call him Abubacer, a corruption of ʾAbū Bakr. He was born in Wādī Āsh the modern Guadix, 40 miles northeast of Granada. He first practiced as a physician in Granada, and then became secretary to the governor of the province. In 1154, he became secretary to the governor of Ceuta and Tangier, a son of ʿAbd al-Muʾmin, the founder of the Almoḥad dynasty. Finally, he received the appointment of court physician to ʾAbū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (1163-84) (B. Carra de Vaux, "Ibn Ṭufayl," in *EI TWO*).

[6] "Through the Thin Veil: on the Question of Communication and the Socialization of Knowledge in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,*" in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1996), 267. Though the modern study and fame of the work has everything to do with Edward Pococke's Latin translation from the Arabic in 1671, which gave *Ḥayy* a more than prominent role for subsequent intellectual history (Hans Daiber, "The Reception of Islamic Philosophy at Oxford in the 17th Century," in *The Introduction of Islamic Philosophy into Europe,* ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1994), 74). Until the 19th century, Simon Ockley's 1708 English translation of Pococke's Latin translation was "the only Arabic philosophical text available in a published edition" (ibid.).
Today there are roughly eleven manuscripts of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* though seven are usually used. While we do not have a certain date for the writing of the tale, Conrad suggests a range from 1177-82, in conjunction with assigning Ibn Rushd the writing of a commentary on Aristotle as an aid in understanding for their patron.

[7] As Conrad notes, "it may well be that irrespective of our author's reputation in later circles as a philosopher, his knowledge of this subject and neither his primary strength nor the basis for his position at court" ("Introduction," in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl,* 34). Instead, it seems much more like that it were his "medical abilities, which gained him the caliph's attention and his post as the ruler's personal physician" and "his skills as a dialectician and propagandist, which probably resulted in a high position among the *talaba*" (ibid.). For a more in-depth discussion of Ibn Ṭufayl's

moment at which his *Ḥayy* appeared was one of unprecedented freedom of thought amongst the strict rule of the Almoḥads.[8] The particular political climate and the author's unique political position, characterized by an extreme proximity to the ruler, form the backdrop to this work.[9]

Considering his political rank and the fact that he wrote about the meaning of the philosophical life to his patron might suggest that, as Dimitri Gutas and many others have argued, Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy* sought "to present philosophy as a complete system to Andalusians." [10] However, foreshadowing what I will discuss below, it is crucial to remember that the tale does not end with the protagonist reaching his desired mystical heights or after a mere demonstration of the intellectual potential of philosophy. Instead, once Ḥayy has reached the highest state, another human being comes onto the scene and introduces him to broader human society and its struggles when it comes to harmonious living and the communication of higher truths. Thus, the tale takes a different turn and eventually makes a crucial statement about the political and social function of philosophers that can be seen as a radicalization of Ibn Bājja's take on the same question: the life of the exceptional sage Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān exemplifies how, for Ibn Ṭufayl, access to the truth philosophy seeks is limited to very few, while the message of the Qur'an orders the lives of most. The revolutionary potential of the excellent is reduced to nothing. In line what we have already seen from my previous engagement with al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja it should come as no surprise that

broader abilities as a philosopher, his predecessors, and sources see Sami Hawi, "Ibn Ṭufayl's appraisal of his Predecessors," *Islamic Studies* 13 (1974): 135-77.

[8] See Watt, "Philosophy and Theology under the Almohads," 101-108; and Madeleine Fletcher, "The Almohad Tawhīd," *Numen* 38, no. 1 (1991): 110-27.

[9] ʾAbū Bakr Bundūd, a pupil of Ibn Ṭufayl, notes that "the commander of the faithful was exceedingly attached to him. I am told that he remained whole days and nights in the palace with him without appearing in public" (Carra de Vaux, "Ibn Ṭufayl"). For Marrākushī's discussion of Ibn Ṭufayl and his account of the introduction of Ibn Rushd to the court see Edmond Fagnan, *Histoire des Almohads* (Alger, 1893), 207-10; the Arabic version of this account is published in Reinhart Dozy, *The History of the Almohads* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1881), 172-175. See also P.G. Thery for an account of the conversation between Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd, and their ruler ("Conversation a Marrakech—revolution intellectuelle dans l'Europe," *L'Islam et l'Occident* (1947): 73-91).

[10] Dimitri Gutas, "Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy," *Oriens* 34 (1994): 241.

fiṭra plays the central role in this argument over the place of philosophy in human life. For it is by their *fiṭar* that the few and the masses are not only distinct but also separate beyond communication or saving. While some are of excellent *fiṭra,* most people are deficient in this respect and it is this divergence that makes for a gulf between ordinary citizens and the sage that is unbridgeable. While Ḥayy shares the traits and form of humanity with all, his exceptional *fiṭra* allows only himself to bypass revelation. The most excellent is unable to teach even the most educated.

Given this vision—particularly considered against the backdrop of Ibn Bājja's potential for political change just discussed—it appears as though attention to *fiṭra* in *Hayy ibn Yaqẓān* might tell us something about Ibn Ṭufayl's possible goal in writing the tale and addressing the court audience. The work suggests that the practice of philosophy by exceptional individuals is a pursuit reserved for isolation and has no place in the education and social and political destiny of most people. This argument very clearly rests on the author's use of *fiṭra* since references consistently show up in the context of an intellectual disparity between the few and the many, an unbridgeable gulf of exceptionality versus deficiency. In what follows I will first discuss the relevant sections and then draw out their importance for the larger questions of the relation of the exceptional philosopher to the masses, the status of revealed religion, and the place of human sociality in the lives of different kinds of people.

II. The Figure of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān and the Question of *Fiṭra*

Given the historical impacts of the motif of a man stranded on an island, left to fend and think for himself, it is easy to emphasize that the figure of Ḥayy is far from restricted to our Andalusian thinker. In this vein, we should note that recent years have seen a proliferation of work

on, and interest in, the connections between the supposed idea of an autodidactic philosopher presented in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and the European Enlightenment.[11] Scholars have heatedly debated and vigorously traced the tale's impact on works such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or Rousseau's *Emile,* as well as, the wider European trend of emancipation from religious tradition from the 17th century onwards. However, more importantly for our purposes, Ibn Ṭufayl himself acknowledges in the introduction that the tale's three main figures "were given their names by Avicenna himself."[12] This, as many scholars point out, not only created the opportunity for much speculation as to the relation to Ibn Sīnā's thought but also for a historical confusion as to the author of Ibn Ṭufayl's tale; for some time his version of *Ḥayy* was mistaken for an Arabic translation of an originally Persian and Avicennian work. [13]

This confusion explains how, as Anne-Marie Goichon notes, it could occur that "until the end of the 19th century the *risāla* of Ibn Ṭufayl was much better known" than the *qiṣṣa* of Ibn Sīnā. For long taken to be an originally Persian work, Ibn Sīnā's (also Arabic) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* "was only established and published two centuries after that of ibn Ṭufayl."[14] Ibn Sīnā had written a number of short tales, two of which are of direct relevance to this chapter: his already mentioned

[11] For example, Shelly Ekhtiar examines how *Ḥayy* served "eighteenth-century Europe's drive to satisfy its own most basic ideological and aesthetic needs" ("Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān: The 18th Century Reception of an Oriental," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 302 (1992): 245). Avner Ben-Zaken's *Reading Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* (Baltimore: The John's Hopkins Press, 2011) traces *Ḥayy's* journey from 12th century Marrakech to the 17th century and the beginnings of the European Enlightenment. And Murad Idris sheds light on the important question of the colonizers' use of *Ḥayy* and Muslim desires to 'fit-in' or be relevant to a European supremacy narrative underneath all the studies on *Ḥayy's* relation to (enlightened) European thought ("Producing Islamic Philosophy: The Life and Afterlives of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* in Global History, 1882–1947," *European Journal of Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (2016): 382-403).

[12] ET in Goodman, 103.

[13] This mistake appears to go back to Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). See Parveen Hasanali's speculations as to the reason for this mistake, given that the earlier al-Marrākushī and Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1274) knew of the two works as separate ("Texts, Translators, Transmissions: *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and its Reception in Muslim, Judaic, and Christian Milieux," (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1995), 124. She attributes this to the restricted circulation of Ibn Ṭufayl's work among only the initiated.

[14] "Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān," in *EI TWO*. We may note that the figure of Ḥayy also appears as a helper figure in his *Risālat al-Qadr* (*Treatise on Destiny*).

Qiṣṣa Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān and *Salāmān and Absāl.*[15] The Avicennian *Ḥayy* most likely dates to the year 1023 and thus to the time of Ibn Sīnā's imprisonment in Ferdajan, during which he also wrote his famous floating man experiment.[16] Ibn Sīnā's *Salāmān and Absāl* is no longer extant and we only know of it through a summary in al-Ṭūsī's (d. 1274) Persian commentary.[17] However, the tale's relevance seems limited, focusing on the triangular relation between king Salāmān and his scheming wife's desire for his brother Absāl.[18]

While it is quite clear that the names of the main characters of Ibn Ṭufayl's work originate in the Avicennian stories, scholars agree that most of the commonalities end there.[19] With respect

[15] On the meaning of the use of story for Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, Sarah Stroumsa argues that ibn Sīnā uses the idea of a *qissa* in order to bring about the desired effect of poetry as described by Aristotle: "The plot of the story of the poetic composition is essential for the role of poetry in activating the imagination" ("Avicenna's Philosophical Stories: Aristotle's Poetics Reinterpreted,*" Arabica* 39, no. 2 (1992): 199). With regard to the question of the particular shape of a philosophical tale and its meaning Salim Kemal argues that "the aesthetic form of a 'philosophical tale' is naturally appropriate to the truths ibn Ṭufayl wants to communicate in his story" ("Justifications of Poetic Validity: Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and Ibn Sīnā's Commentary on the *Poetics* of Aristotle," in *The World of Ibn Tufayl,* 228). In the case of Ibn Ṭufayl, we can only guess regarding his choice to write a tale and especially as to his motivations for its particular shape, straddling a philosophical treatise and an extended story line.

[16] Goichon, "Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān." She briefly summarizes the plot as follows: "the human soul, mastering its sensual faculties, comes with these, as it were while walking, to the edge of intellectual knowledge. A splendid Sage, whose beauty is unassailable by time, appears before it, and the soul desires his acquaintance. He is the first to speak (it is he who gives the intelligibles), a conversation develops; the Sage gives his name—Living, son of Wakeful. 'My profession', he said, 'is to travel through all the countries of the world, to be able to embrace them all in an exhaustive knowledge (it is he who possesses all the intelligibles). My face is always turned towards my Father […] and I have received from him the keys to all knowledge'. Looking at his interlocutor, the soul with its human nature, he tells it that its features reveal it to be the possessor of the best of the natures in the terrestrial world; but it must beware of its evil companions. These are the taste for carnal pleasures, violence and giddy imagination, that retails both true and false. It is, however, impossible to remain aloof from these on earth; it is necessary at least to compel them to obey, to preserve a balance, and not to let them take control. With this warning, the soul reflects and is then quite ready to learn how to keep these difficult companions under restraint. It would be very happy to travel like the Sage. He replies that, in its present condition, it can only make a journey punctuated with halts. And the soul replies by questioning him about the regions that he knows and about which he has undertaken to acquire complete information". In the final section Ḥayy provides the soul, as Goichon notes, with a metaphysical geography of the world and explains the forms, eventually inviting him to follow his path and ultimately reach the king.

[17] Hasanali notes that the *Ishārāt* also twice refers to the pair ("Texts, Translators, Transmissions," 85). Additionally, there is a Hermetistic tale by that name related by Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (d. 873) and one written by Jāmi (d. 1492), though neither appear relevant to our inquiry; rather, according to Hasanali, it appears as if the Hermetistic and Avicennian one are closely related to each other and Jāmi's story (ibid., 87).

[18] As Stroumsa summarizes, the work "tells of King Salāmān and his beloved brother Absāl. Salāmān's lustful wife schemes to gain the favor of Absāl. Absāl's persistent refusal to submit to her, despite all his sufferings, leads to the tragic end of the story" ("Avicenna's Philosophical Stories,"184).

[19] Goichon notes that while Ibn Ṭufayl, "without any doubt […] borrowed the title from ibn Sīnā," he "curiously enough […] was to introduce a philosophical thesis entirely contrary to that writer's"—meaning the idea that the active intellect is not outside man but rather Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy is an incarnation of that active intellect ("Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,"

to the two *Ḥayys* we may note that Ibn Sīnā's story is much shorter and very different indeed.[20] Although scholars debate this matter, it appears as if for Ibn Sīnā a human connection with the active intellect (the lowest of the intellects) is only an option after death, while Ibn Ṭufayl gives the name *Hayy ibn Yaqẓān* (Alive son of the Awake) to his protagonist. As Jim Colville notes, "Ibn Tufayl […] impl[ies] that the active intellect is not something external to man and, consequently, that human perfection is something achievable in this life."[21] Thus while it appears that Ḥayy in ibn Ṭufayl's account *is* indeed the active intellect, in the Avicennian account *Ḥayy* takes the storyteller on an internal pilgrimage. While I want to highlight the relation to Avicennian thought in broad theme and characters, the different tales bear little resemblance beyond their protagonists.[22]

in *EI TWO*). While many over the last decades have come to agree with this assessment, some, such as Kruk, think that the Ṭufaylian Ḥayy is not himself an incarnation of the active intellect but rather seeks union with it ("Neoplatonists and After," 80). Such a reading would make the Ṭufaylian narrative approach the Avicennian once again. Others, such as Gotthard Strohmaier note that Ibn Ṭufayl agrees with Ibn Bājja over against Ibn Sīnā by arguing that a human being could in fact connect with the active intellect, without *being* that intellect, as Goichon et al have argued ("Chaj ben Mekitz—die unbekannte Quelle der Divina Commedia," *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch* 55/56 (1980/1981): 203).

[20] However, at this point I should note that some scholars raise doubts regarding Ibn Ṭufayl's familiarity with the Avicennian corpus. Thus Gutas argues that had these stories been readily available in Andalus, it is hard to see how it could have been possible for ibn Ṭufayl to alter their contents so radically in his own tale and still ostensibly claim to be presenting Ibn Sīnā's Eastern philosophy ("Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy," 234). For Gutas, the Tufaylian Eastern philosophy is essentially a fiction created by ibn Ṭufayl to bolster his authority and that later became an Orientalist obsession; in the end, however, this Avicennian 'Easter philosophy' has little to nothing to do with Ibn Sīnā himself ("Avicenna's Eastern Philosophy," 159-162). On the disagreement between (what has come to be called) Henry Corbin's 'maximalist' reading and Gutas' 'minimalist' account see Aaron Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 30-35. Whether or not he actually did know Ibn Sīnā's version or merely wanted to use his authority, at the very least, as Idris has noted, we can regard the Ṭufaylian account as a creative work that connects Absāl and Salāmān to Ḥayy and thus "invites us to read [the] allegory in relation to the characters in Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and *Absāl and Salāmān*" ("Ibn Ṭufayl's Critique of Politics," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 7 (2011): 69).

[21] *Two Andalusian Philosophers* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1999), xiv.

[22] Ockley speaks according to what is still current scholarly opinion when he says about the Ṭufaylian *Ḥayy*: "Our author borrowed the name of his characters, but little more than this, from ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) […] [whose] allegorical tale of a few pages entitled *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* [is] a mechanical and lifeless production compared with Ibn Ṭufail's story, and quite different from it in plan" (*The History of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* (London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1929), 23).

In terms of the concerns of this chapter, it is important to highlight, that *fiṭra* does appear in Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy.* However, this is the case only once in the entire work, namely in a passage that describes the different climates of the world and a realm that lies beyond each of them:

> But there are two other strange circumscriptions: one beyond the Occident, the other beyond the Orient. For each of them, there is a barrier preventing access from this world to that other circumscription, for no one can reach there or force a passage save the Elect among the mass of men, those who have gained a strength that does not originally belong to man by right of nature (*fiṭra*).[23]

The next section then goes on to explain that a permanent, mystical spring of water is the source of that necessary regeneration. According to Corbin, the discussion here has to do with what he calls a first and second nature: for the journey of beyond the confines of this world the elect need "a force that they owe not to their natural birth but to their second birth."[24] This idea of a special force, in turn, intricately connects to the idea of initiation throughout the whole tale, which is based on the conversation with the active intellect or Ḥayy. Goichon explicates said passage in her commentary on the recital as the "disposition naturelle."[25] According to her, *fiṭra* operates as "l'intelligence spontanée" or a spontaneous intelligence, which, according to the presented argument in the text, is not sufficient.[26] While the masses stay at the level of particular judgments and do very little with respect to transcending their nature, a small elite is called to move beyond their natural endowments.[27] However, given how rarely and unexplained the author uses *fiṭra,* it seems safest to merely note the term's immediate invocations here: the notion of an elect, potentially a sense of intelligence and of going beyond some basic, first nature or *fiṭra* that does not simply yield the desired results. We might say then that there is in Ibn Sīnā's tale at the very least a mention of the themes that would become crucial to Ibn Ṭufayl's tale and its division of

[23] Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 141 (section X).
[24] *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 158.
[25] *Le Récit* Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 69.
[26] Ibid., 70.
[27] Goichon and Corbin's commentaries make use of the commentaries on Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy* by his student Ibn Zaylā (d. 1048), though there is little to nothing illuminating on the reference to *fiṭra* there.

humanity by *fiṭra*. Ibn Sīnā's sense of a supernatural, added kind of perfection is, however, quite unique. While Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy could on some reading be supernatural, the *falāsifa* discussed in this dissertation do not venture beyond the realm of this world.

Now while Ibn Sīnā, as the temporary and probably conceptual, ancestor to Ibn Ṭufayl does use *fiṭra* in one instance, this is significantly not the case for other readers of the Avicennian narrative. Thus, another prominent thinker whom the Avicennian tales and their three main figures inspired was Yaḥya ibn Habash Suhrawardī (d. 1191). According to Parveen Hasanali "both the authors [meaning Suhrawardī and ibn Ṭufayl] use the initiatory tale to elaborate Ibn Sīnā's oriental philosophy."[28] And while Suhrawardī's tale is much closer to the original Avicennian account of a soul's travel, he has—the three names aside—very little in common with the Ṭufaylian work in terms of content. Additionally, Suhrawardī does not write a separate piece but rather picks up the Avicennian '*qiṣṣa'* in his *A Tale of Occidental Exile* (*Qiṣṣat al-ghurbat al-gharbīya*), hoping to draw out what he perceives as missing.[29] The work thus focuses on an elaboration of spiritual mysteries and Platonic forms, and, most importantly for our purposes, it does not use or discuss *fiṭra.*

However, I do believe there is a possible predecessor or inspiration for Ibn Ṭufayl's particular tale that has so far been largely ignored. This is the *Epistle of Contemplation* (*Risālat al-iʿtibār*) by Ibn Masarra (d. 931).[30] While scholarship has yet to fully explore Ibn Masarra's life

[28] "Texts, Translators, Transmissions," 89.
[29] Ahmed Amīn has edited a work containing the Avicennian, Ṭufaylian, and Suhrawardian Ḥayys (*Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān lī Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Ṭufayl wa al-Suhrawardī* (Cairo, 1959). For a translation of the Suhrawardīan tale see *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi,* trans. William Thackston (London: the Octagon Press, 1982). See a discussion of the tale in Hasanali, "Texts, Translators, Transmissions," 89ff.
[30] See Michael Ebstein, "Ibn Masarra," in *EI THREE: "*Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Masarra al-Jabalī was born in Cordoba in 883. He had studied various religious sciences (including *ḥadīth*) under his father and several other Andalusī scholars before embarking on a voyage to the East, as was the custom at the time among Andalusī intellectuals […]. Ibn Masarra visited al-Qayrawān and Mecca; the teachers under whom he may have studied during his stay in these (and perhaps other) cities are unknown, and the exact dates of his travels are unclear […]. In any case, after having returned to al-Andalus, Ibn Masarra*,* joined by a group of devotees, withdrew to the mountains in the

and legacy, he is generally considered the first Andalusian mystic and philosopher. The *Epistle of Contemplation* is one of two of his works that have come down to us. [31] As Sarah Stroumsa has argued, the work weaves the Qur'an and Neoplatonic philosophy together. The epistle appeals to the Qur'an in its basic claim that God "gave His servants intellects, which are light of His light, so that by them they may behold His order and come to know His decree."[32] It describes a reasoned ascent that moves through the different levels of the universe and culminates in an encounter with God.[33] As the epistle argues, whether by reason upwards or by prophetic message downwards, one arrives at the same result. There is no contradiction between what can be read out of the world and what the prophets relate: both proclaim God's lordship through their respective means.[34] It then proceeds to describe order of the intellectual ascent, from observing animals and plants, to the many layers of the world above, and finally the divine. At the end stands the insight that by contemplation and prophetic message it is necessary that the world and all in it must have one lord and creator.[35] This general claim and the details of this kind of reasoning are all too familiar to

vicinity of Córdoba (hence his nickname, "al-Jabalī", that is, "the mountain dweller"), possibly to engage in ascetic-contemplative practices or in order to evade confrontations with the authorities (the sources, it should be emphasized, offer no conclusive evidence for such confrontations during his own lifetime). Following Ibn Masarra's death […], his students seem to have carried on studying and propagating his teachings and perhaps also his works. During the 950s and 960s […] authorities of the Umayyad caliphate, which then ruled Islamic Spain, accused Ibn Masarra's followers of heresy and unbelief and demanded their repentance. In at least one instance, their books were publicly burned. […] Over the years, the followers of Ibn Masarra disappeared […], but certain teachings of his (or attributed to him) continued to circulate in al-Andalus."

[31] References are to the Arabic edition published by Garrido Clemente ("Edición crítica de la *Risālat al-iʿtibār* de Ibn Masarra de Córdoba," in *Miscelánea de Estudios Àrabes y Hebraicos* 56 (2007): 81–104). An English translation and discussion can be found in Sarah Stroumsa, "The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy" (*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam,* 36 (2009): 201-53).

[32] ET in Stroumsa, 216f.

[33] Cf. "The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy,"211f.

[34] In Ibn Masarra's words, "contemplation bears testimony to the prophetic message and verifies it; they find the prophetic message in agreement with contemplation, with no contradiction between them. The proof is thus [doubly] supported, certitude is revealed, and the hearts attain the realities of faith" (ET in Stroumsa, 218).

[35] "The prophetic message, then, being initiated from the direction of the throne, descends towards the earth; it concurs with contemplation that ascends upward to the throne from the direction of the earth the two equal one another, there is no difference between them. No clear message comes from God without there being in the world a sign that indicates it, and there is no sign in the world which indicates a divine message without there being a prophecy that had proclaimed it and had alerted to it, in either a detailed or a comprehensive way" (ET in Stroumsa, 225).

those who have read *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān.* By theme alone, one could thus argue that Ibn Tufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*— while keeping the broad outlines of this story of intellectual ascent in line with prophetic revelation—fills in the details, as well as weaves in figures know from Ibn Sīnā's recitals.[36]

Beyond a possible influence in terms of the content of the tale, Ibn Masarra also uses *fiṭra* in a way that could have inspired Ibn Ṭufayl. Broadly speaking, *fiṭra* guides the inquiry at crucial points, though—and this is significant—it does so in the context of specifically learning about God. *Fiṭra* in the epistle first shows up when the seeker of knowledge raises contemplation above nature in order to find nature's ruling force. In this move the person is guided by the "testimony of the *fiṭra,*"[37] which guides their search for the ruling power that is in charge of nature and its diverse processes. Similarly, after observation of the firmament it is again the "testimony of the *fiṭra*"[38] that indicates that there has to be something that guides the movements of the planets. Thirdly, when reaching the place of the footstool it is by "the perception (*ḥis*) of the *fiṭra*"[39] that the inquirer realizes that there has to be yet a higher power.[40] Finally, it is "in the perception (*ḥis*) of the *fiṭra*"[41] that we know that the divine is not restricted or in any way in contact with those things restricted. *Fiṭra* is used then as the source of knowledge that guides the inquiry. And while this inquiry is related to God and thus seemingly theological in focus, the fact that *fiṭra* has an intellectual conception here is made clear from a parallelism just a few lines down from the discussion of restriction. For here Ibn Masarra writes that we know "in the perception of the

[36] Though, of course, it is not impossible that Ibn Ṭufayl was somehow familiar with al-Fārābī or Ibn Bājja's conception and use of *fiṭra.*
[37] AR in Clemente, 95.
[38] Ibid. A variant reads "witness by the *fiṭra*" (cf. AR in Clemente, 95 n. 81).
[39] AR in Clemente, 96.
[40] The same phrase, "by the perception (*ḥis*) of the *fiṭra*" also occurs when further contemplating the great soul (cf. AR in Clemente, 98).
[41] Ibid., 99.

intellect (*ḥis al-ʿaql*) that while everything depends on the divine, he does not resemble anything but is distinct. However, Ibn Masarra also makes it clear that the source of this intellect is the divine. For while God is completely unlike his creation, they can know him through proofs and the traces that he etched onto them.[42]

As Stroumsa summarizes, Ibn Masarra's conception and use of *fiṭra* in this work is seemingly curious since it "differs from the one found in canonical sources which identifies it with inborn Islam."[43] Instead, the work conceives of the *fiṭra* more in a philosophical sense, as "the inborn faculty to know and the innate perception of certain universal truths."[44] While in the work clearly related to the inquiry into the nature of the divine, such a conception, as I would argue, is rather in line with both thinkers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Ṭufayl. Given the geographical proximity, as well as the proximity of both overall theme of the work and its particular use of *fiṭra,* I think that Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* might have served—alongside Ibn Sīnā's figures and names—as an inspiration or source for Ibn Ṭufayl tale in general and its use of *fiṭra* in particular. Ibn Masarra sets the stage for a reading of *fiṭra* as the guiding principle of a reasoned ascent to God and thus the intellectual basis of human beings as creatures of that divine.[45]

III. *Fiṭra* in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*

That *fiṭra* splays a significant role in ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy* is clear not only from the relatively frequent use of the term in the tale.[46] Instead, the early reception of the work reflects its particular

[42] Cf. ET in Stroumsa 223; AR in Celemente, 99. There are, in distinction to the *fiṭra,* general reference to the nature of things such as water (*ṭabīʿa;* cf. AR in Clemente, 93 and 94).
[43] "The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy," 233.
[44] Ibid.
[45] I think this insight is worth publishing by itself as it intervenes in an original fashion into the longstanding debate regarding the sources of Ibn Ṭufayl's tale more generally; and its relation to Ibn Sīnā in particular.
[46] We may also note that the connection between a strong *fiṭra* and the simple life is one that Medieval Islamic thought generally approved of and cited. A good example is Ibn Khaldūn's reference in the *Muqqadima* to the simple life of the Bedouins and relatedly them being in touch with their original nature. He believes that the Bedouins are "closer to

use of *fiṭra.* Already Ibn al-Khaṭīb's (d. 1374) *Rawḍat al-taʿrīf bi al-ḥubb al-sharīf* connects Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy* with a certain understanding of *fiṭra.*[47] In a section entitled "concerning the soundness (*salāma*) of the *fiṭra* and the possibility of independent learning of the arts and the sciences and to know God with that,"[48] he notes that some people have claimed that the *fiṭra* is sufficient (*kāfīatan*) for knowledge of the truth (*al-ḥaqq)* and God and that the sending of the messenger was not necessary.[49] Ibn al-Khaṭīb disagrees vehemently with such an idea, noting that just like the sick are not guided to medicine, men are not guided to the right remedies for their offenses. Most significantly, Ibn al-Khaṭīb then directly invokes Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd[50] as proponents of a standpoint that believes a good life, ascetic practices, and the *fiṭra* are enough. As part of his introduction to the two he narrates the story of Ḥayy and elaborates what he perceives to be the underlying idea, namely that humans can stay on the right path by themselves. In line

being good than sedentary people" because "the soul in its first natural state of creation (*al-fiṭra al-awwalī*) is ready to accept whatever good or evil may arrive and leave an imprint upon it" (ʾAbū Zyd Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah,* trans. Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 253f). He then quotes the *ḥadīth* mentioning that every child is born upon the *fiṭra.* Now while sedentary people are too busy with "all kinds of pleasures" (ibid., 254), Bedouins are less concerned with this world and are thus "closer to the first natural state (*al-fiṭra al-awwalī*) and more remote from the evil habits that have been impressed upon the souls (of sedentary people) through numerous and ugly, blameworthy customs" (ibid.).

[47]See also Josef Montada's brief discussion of this reference. He notes that "Ibn Khaṭīb (d. 1375) counted Ibn Ṭufayl among those who consider that human reason (*fiṭra*) has the capacity to know the Truth by means of logical demonstration, who think that prophets are not necessary, and that the knowledge of God resides in the soul"("Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* eds. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 175). In this context, it seems important to note that Ibn Ṭufayl does not directly connect Ḥayy's reasoning himself to the existence of the Necessary or some of his attributes with *fiṭra.* While the explicit understanding of *fiṭra* as a natural awareness of God is an influential conception in Islamic thought (as I have shown in chapter 2 in particular), *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* appears to make no such explicit connection and rather uses the term to speak of the exceptional, intellectual gift of its protagonist (and other people's shortcomings).

[48] Muḥammad Ibn-ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Khaṭīb*, Rawḍat al-taʿrīf bi al-ḥubb al-sharīf* (Beirut, 1970), 1: 275.

[49] Ibid. The whole sections ranges from pp. 275-78.

[50] *Rawḍat al-taʿrīf bi al-ḥubb al-sharīf*, 276. As we will see in the next chapter, this claim regarding Ibn Rushd's stance on the matter is inaccurate. Ibn Rushd in fact strongly emphasizes the need for education and the social setting of such education. Ḥayy figures are no possibility in his estimation. However, it is probably still true that Ibn Rushd's complex assessment of the place of religion in different people's lives would not have pleased Ibn al-Khaṭīb.

with such claims, Ibn al-Khaṭīb ultimately concludes that the truth of God can only be reached through prophecy (*wal-ḥaqq ʾallā yuwasal ila Allā ʾillā nūr al-nubūwwati*).[51]

While I am not going to examine Ibn al-Khaṭīb's arguments in depth, it is important to see how very early scholars perceived the work to be making a claim about *fiṭra.* And as such, it seems, a controversial one: namely that a human being (maybe not 'the' human being) was able to reach knowledge of God and the truth in isolation and without recourse to the prophets or revelation. As we have seen, this reading fits in with the kind of response Ibn al-Nafīs later made to the Ṭufaylian *Ḥayy* in writing his own tale. What these responses highlight for us is two things: first, the importance of examining Ibn Ṭufayl's own use of *fiṭra;* and second, the complexity of Islamic debates over a concept such as *fiṭra,* as well as the implications that this complexity has for the key concerns of this dissertation as previously outlined.[52] In many ways, Ibn Ṭufayl's tale illustrates the *falāsifa*'s conception of *fiṭra* (broadly conceived!), particularly highlighting its intellectual reading and relation to questions of politics.

While a philosophical tale and not a philosophical treatise, a brief survey of *Ḥayy* shows that *fiṭra* plays a significant role for Ibn Ṭufayl.[53] For one, he uses *fiṭra* in contradistinction to

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[51] *Rawḍat al-taʿrīf bi al-ḥubb al-sharīf*, 278.

[52] It is not clear to me whether attention to *fiṭra* helps us better understand Ibn Ṭufayl's tale, or whether Ibn Ṭufayl wrote the tale to elucidate the concept of *fiṭra.* The latter option seems less likely since he conceptualizes insufficiently and, if *fiṭra* really were the heart of the work, there is comparably little attention to *fiṭra* overall.

[53] In this context, we ought to note that the exact purpose of ibn Ṭufayl's writing of his *Ḥayy* is as controversial as is its purported overall message. Scholarly opinions on the question developed along a, by now, well-known path: Pococke in the 17th century emphasized (as his title suggests) the autodidact's ability to transcend himself and reach the active intellect. Gauthier in the early 20th century then challenged the idea of the ascent as primary and rather emphasized the harmony of philosophy and religion. George Hourani in 1956 turned attention back to the question of ascent. More recently we can witness a proliferation of discourse on this question, with answers ranging from concern with Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy (Bashier Salman, *The Story of Islamic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011)) to the idea of a tale of initiation (Aaron Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine*). Others, such as Conrad, would like to harmonize the opposing positions of the historical narrative, seeing the concerns of both Gauthier and Hourani present ("Through the Thin Veil," in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl*). Whether there is indeed only one message shall not concern us here, but I do believe it likely, as the above discussion indicates, that Ibn Ṭufayl's work is a response to Ibn Masarra's tale, as well as the Avicennian tales and maybe even the latter's philosophical thought experiments. In this vein, Goodman argues that Ibn Ṭufayl takes the Avicennian challenge of the floating man to the social, raising the question of what "would human thought be like in the absence not of a body but of culture and tradition? What would a curious, insightful, and dedicated human being think about God and the world, the self,

words such as form (*sūra*), a straightforward nature (*ṭabīʿa*), and even disposition (*istiʿadad*), and creation (*khulq*)—though with little explicit help as to their distinction.[54] Additionally, there is a proliferation in number compared to Ibn Sīnā. *Fiṭra* appears a total of eight times in *Ḥayy*, including twice in the plural (*fiṭar*). Generally, those references can be divided into three groups: the thought of previous thinkers, Ḥayy's exceptionality, and the islanders' deficiency. Two of the references qualify the noun with deficiency, two with strength, and four with exceptionality (three times by way of an adjective (*fāʾiqa*) and once the appropriate noun (*fāʾiq*)).[55] Moreover, *fiṭra* shows up in the preface of the tale alone three times. In what follows, I will argue that in line with thinkers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja, *fiṭra* for Ibn Ṭufayl describes an intellectual capacity or ability to reason. According to Goodman, we may speak of "a man's natural capacities [as] his '*fiṭra*'" and "in the case of Ḥayy, the *fiṭra* rapidly comes to mean his genius."[56] And, we may add, as such it can differ or, at the very least, develop differently. In the case of Ḥayy, it is capable of the highest ideal of human perfection. However, most human beings are trapped in the concerns of this world and often do not move beyond. Finally, I will argue that this intellectual conception of *fiṭra* has important implications for ibn Ṭufayl's view of revelation, the place of ethical thought, and the role of society in human life.

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and its place in the cosmos, without the help—or interference—of religion, or even language? Rather than describe an introspective experiment in sensory deprivation, Ibn Ṭufayl lays out a thought experiment based on the premise of social isolation" (*Ibn Tufayl's* Hayy ibn Yaqẓān, x). However, the exact relation, especially when it comes to the thought of predecessors such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī, is fraught with difficulty because, as Conrad notes, "in appropriating pieces of text that suit his purpose, [Ibn Ṭufayl] does not hesitate to deploy them in ways that the original authors had never intended or […] with results they would have categorically rejected" ("Introduction," in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl,* 33).

[54] For reference to '*sūra*' see, for example, ET in Goodman, 107 (AR in Gauthier, 29); for '*khulq*' see ET in Goodman, 107 (AR in Gauthier, 29) and 109 (AR in Gauthier, 32); for '*ṭabīʿa*' ET in Goodman 123 (AR in Gauthier, 65), and for '*istiʿadad*' ET in Goodman 126 (AR in Gauthier, 74).

[55] Familiar from the previous chapter's discussion of Ibn Bājja.

[56] *Ibn Tufayl's* Hayy ibn Yaqẓān, 13. According to Goodman *fitra* is not used to speak of "concrete entities, but dispositions of the substantial soul" (ibid., 64). As we will see, aspects of his *fitra* are simply introduced and accepted, including his moral sense. According to Goodman he simply accepts "divine endowments" (ibid., 65) on the basis of "radical monotheism", which means that "all branches of the soul's action [are treated] as activations of capacities granted by God" (ibid., 66).

i) Analysis of the *fiṭra* sections

Fiṭra shows up for the first three times in the author's preface to the story proper. Here Ibn Ṭufayl offers an account of the origin of the work, his relation to predecessors such as Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, or Ibn Bājja, and warns his readers about the limits of communicating mystical knowledge. The first reference occurs when he discusses what he perceives to be Avicennian thoughts regarding the attainment of esoteric knowledge through different means. Ibn Sīnā invokes the image of a blind boy suddenly gaining sight, who then compares his previous ideas of the world through different senses to the new, visionary information. This boy is described as blind but with *jaiyyid al-fiṭra qawī al-ḥads.*[57] Goodman translates this as "born blind but otherwise intelligent and well endowed"[58] and draws a connection to Ḥayy who is perfectly endowed, with a good *fiṭra* and without any sensory impairments.[59] A more literal translation might describe the boy as having "a good *fiṭra* and strong senses." In either case it is important to register the qualification of *fiṭra* as something that can be described as 'good' and hence, by implication, might also be in a less ideal condition.[60] Given that the context is one that contrasts the boy's visual impairment with his otherwise 'good' *fiṭra,* the sense appears to be that of 'sound mind' or 'healthy intellect'.[61] However, given that it is merely an account of Ibn Sīnā's thought, we might not want to place too much weight on it.

Next Ibn Ṭufayl directly addresses his audience, pondering its potential desire for an introduction to mystical experience. He immediately tempers any hopes, bemoaning the lack of

[57] AR in Gauthier, 7.
[58] ET in Goodman, 97.
[59] *Ibn Ṭufayl's* Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān, 176 (note 28).
[60] Which, at this point in our foray into *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa*, is a familiar vision,
[61] Here we may note that the image of the blind boy and his ideas of the world in colors, as Goodman notes, stems from al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1953), 64). There, however, the analogy is with reference to prophecy, not "the private revelation of the mystic" as Goodman notes (*Ibn Ṭufayl's* Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, 176).

such an introduction in the work of such eminent figures as Aristotle, al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā. Equally one ought not to suppose that "any Andalusian has written anything adequate on this subject."[62] The reason for such a lack in the latter case is that "before the spread of philosophy (*falsafa*) *and* formal logic to the West all native Andalusians of exceptional intellect (*al-fiṭra al-fāʾiqa)* devoted their lives to mathematics."[63] Again, the sense of a noteworthy intellectual capability is present. This appears to be in line with the reference above, setting *fiṭra* in context with the boy's healthy mind and qualifying it with the use of an adjective (in this case 'excellent,' rather than good'). Most importantly for what follows, we ought to take note of the exact phrase of an exceptional *fiṭra* (*al-fiṭra al-fāʾiqa*), which will dominate the rest of Ibn Ṭufayl's work and characterize its protagonist.[64]

The third time *fiṭra* shows up in the introduction this exact phrase recurs. Characterizing al-Ghazālī's teaching style as tailored to his audience, Ibn Ṭufayl claims that much of his thought was contained "in the form of hints and intimations, of value to those who hear them only after they have found the truth by their own insights or to someone innately gifted [of exceptional (*fāʾiq*) *fiṭra*] and primed to understand."[65] Such people, those of exceptional ability, according to our author "need only the subtlest hints (*bi-aysar al-ʾishāra*)."[66] The meaning, as implied by the context of being able to understand and taught, is clearly that some people only need very little help in reaching the truth and those are the people of special *fiṭra.* Thus for the third time *fiṭra* appears in the context of an intellectual capacity and one that is exceptional (and again it seems, by implication, one that varies). While there is no explanation as to the source of this exceptionality

[62] ET in Goodman, 99.
[63] AR in Gauthier, 12.
[64] And which, of course, is a familiar phrase to us at this point.
[65] ET in Goodman, 101 (modified).
[66] AR in Gauthier, 16.

or even what exactly the *fiṭra* is, this third use substantiates the previous two. The author uses *fiṭra* in the context of an intellectual capacity, in this case one that sets apart those who merely need the smallest bit of information in order to perceive the truth. Like the blind boy and the Andalusians of mathematical interest, this special sub-group of Ghazālī's readership set themselves apart through their noteworthy *fiṭra,* which allows for an advantage in the attainment of knowledge.

The connection to the intellect and the use of qualifiers is not limited to Ibn Ṭufayl's discussion of his predecessors in the introduction but rather continues in the story proper. The next two times *fiṭra* occurs is in immediate succession, in a section that discusses Ḥayy's musings on the universe and his eventual recognition of its oneness. First, he considers the question of the heavenly bodies as bodies and thus the question of their spatial extension. Unsure whether "they extended infinitely in all directions or were finite,"[67] it is "by the power of his *fiṭra* and the brilliance of his mind (*khāṭir*)"[68] that he understands that there are no such things as infinite bodies. *Fiṭra* here again points to an intellectual distinction, this time for logical insight, and one that allows him to solve a most difficult issue. [69] The use not only attests to the intellectual sense of *fiṭra* but also an air of exceptionality by referring to Ḥayy's special power. The parallel phrase of his brilliant mind underlines this impression by invoking both an intellectual context and Ḥayy's elevated status—thus enforcing the impression from the preface with respect to the possible variety of *fiṭra.*

A few lines further on, Ibn Ṭufayl reiterates the idea of a particularly strong intellectual capability by returning to the phrase we encountered in the preface. He writes that "once the

[67] ET in Goodman 128.
[68] AR in Gauthier, 75. This latter part is my translation, Goodman merely says "his inborn talent and brilliance" (*Ibn Ṭufayl's* Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, 128).
[69] While not providing a simple awareness or knowledge of God (as many modern readers would assume), one should note that within the tale, the intermediary step of the heavenly bodies' nature assisting him along the way towards God, making Ḥayy realize the unity of the cosmos and the need for a cause later on.

exceptional (*fāʾiqa*) *fiṭra*, which had made him aware of such a remarkable argument, had demonstrated to him the finitude of the heavens" he sought to know their form.[70] The passage affirms both the intellectual context and exceptional nature of Ḥayy's *fiṭra.* In the Arabic the use of the preposition *bi* makes it clear that it is 'through' or 'by' the *fiṭra* that Ḥayy had understood the nature of the heavenly bodies. These two passages hence underline three important ideas for us: for one, *fiṭra* seems to point to an intellectual capacity or maybe endowment that is different from a mere intelligence (*khāṭir*) and yet set in parallel to that.[71] Secondly, Ḥayy's *fiṭra* is exceptional. Whether it is well developed or simply by itself better endowed than others is not clear at this point but it carries a mark of distinction, just like the people barely in need of hints that Ibn Ṭufayl mentions in the introduction. Thirdly, *fiṭra* is frequently used with the adjective *fāʾiq/a,* which might be relevant to my inquiry in further chapters.

The last part of the tale, when we witness Ḥayy's encounter with other human beings, highlights that Ḥayy's abilities are exceptional from another angle. The commentator remarks upon Ḥayy's idea of humankind, basic to his surprise and indignation at the way the messenger had packaged the truth for people and spent so much time ordering their (monetary) affairs. He writes, "what made him think so […] was his naïve belief that all men had excellent intellectual capabilities (*fiṭar fāʾiqa*), piercing intellects (*adhhān thāqiba*)[or a great mental acumen], and determined spirits (*nufūs ʿāzima*)."[72] The quote is very revealing since it supports the main facets of the previous uses in two ways: first, the excerpt underlines the idea that Ḥayy had an exceptional *fiṭra* by noting his misconceived assumption that all humans are like him, supported by a return to the adjective *fāʾiqa*. Second, the *fiṭra* has an intellectual sense directly and indirectly: directly *fiṭra*

[70] ET in Goodman, 129.
[71] Which is an important indication based on the rules of Arabic grammar, in which the conjunction 'and' (*wa*) connects two equal parts.
[72] AR in Gauthier, 147.

is used parallel to two other intellectual concepts, intellect and spirit, and like *fiṭra,* they come with adjectives of distinction and excellence. Indirectly we can see our intellectual reading of the term affirmed as it is the *fiṭar,* intellects, and spirits, that allow for the seeking of the truth and an existence beyond the practical injunctions of religious law. Naïve as Ḥayy is at this stage, before any extended human contact, he believes that others will be able (or willing?) to relate to the truth as he has:

> If people only understood things as they really are […], they would forget these inanities and seek the Truth. They would not need all these laws. No one would have any property of his own to be demanded as charity or for which human beings might struggle and risk amputation.[73]

The commentator supports my reading when she immediately inverts Ḥayy's erroneous assumption, meaning believing all people to be of exceptional *fiṭra,* by noting that Ḥayy "was not aware how much they were affected by stupidity and deficiency (*naqṣ*), and lack of thought and weakness of determination, 'like sheep that had lost their way'."[74] The contrast created between the masses and our exceptional protagonist by use of the qualifiers *fāʾiqa* and *naqṣ* again solidifies our previous reading of the *fiṭra* passages as pointing to an intellectual excellence setting Ḥayy apart.

The contrast between Ḥayy's exceptionality and the islanders' deficiency, as well as the overall intellectual context, continues when Ḥayy seeks to meet them. Surprised and "dumbfounded"[75] by the approach to the truth Absāl relates to him, our protagonist immediately desires to meet and teach them. Merely a few lines down from the previous occurrence, Absāl however warns his new acquaintance, trying to discourage him from the idea of relating his

[73] ET in Goodman, 162.
[74] AR in Gauthier, 147. As Goodman points out, this is an invocation of Qur'an 7: 178 and maybe 25: 46 (*Ibn Ṭufayl's* Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, 232 n. 262).
[75] ET in Goodman, 162.

knowledge of the truth to them. Invoking the contrast with the *fiṭra* that is *fāʾiqa,* we read that Absāl tries to explain to the naïve sage the islanders' "deficiency (*naqṣ*) of *fiṭra."*[76] Both in language and theme—namely the inability to truly grasp the truth and the repeated use of the word *naqṣ/ nāqiṣ*—a reversal of what we encountered before in the context of Ḥayy, unfolds before the reader. While Ḥayy's *fiṭra* is exceptional (*fāʾiqa*), the islanders are marked by deficiency (*naqṣ*) in this regard and thus—according to Absāl's warnings—unable to receive what Ḥayy hopes to share with them. This brief reference substantiates the impression of an intellectual sense, the existence of a gap between Ḥayy and the masses, and the reoccurrence of set phrases: the repeated contrast between *fāʾiq* and *nāqiṣ* could not be clearer.

Intellectual deficiency vs. exceptionality resurfaces one last time when the narrator gives an account of Ḥayy's actual teaching efforts with the islanders. We learn that the subjects of his efforts are ideal candidates for his efforts in theory, for "these were men who loved the good and sincerely yearned for the Truth."[77] However, due to the "defectiveness (*naqṣ*) of their *fiṭar"*[78] they could not seek the truth like Ḥayy could but did so rather in a human way.[79] The use of the preposition *li* in the Arabic makes it very clear that it is indeed due to the deficiency in that they are unable to relate to God in the way Ḥayy does himself and now tries to teach to them. Again, we see the three central aspects of the use of *fiṭra* we have encountered throughout: for one, *fiṭra* is what allows certain intellectual advances and despite the good intentions, the deficiency in *fiṭra* is what prevents the islanders from receiving Ḥayy's insights. Second, there is thus a contrast constantly present in Ibn Ṭufayl's use of the term, between the exceptionality of Ḥayy and the

[76] Goodman translates Absāl's warning as "how defective they are in character" (ET in Goodman,162).
[77] ET in Goodman, 163.
[78] AR in Gauthier, 150
[79] Goodman translates this occurrence of *li-naqṣi al-fiṭarihim* as "inborn infirmity" (ET in Goodman, 163). The contrast with exceptionality implies that it is not a total lack of *fiṭra* but rather that their lack is partly constitutive of their *fiṭra* (which fits with the sense of the Arabic *nāqiṣ*).

deficiency of the islanders, and it implies the possible variability of *fiṭra.* Thirdly, the author describes the contrast between an exceptional and a deficient *fiṭra* continuously with the same adjectives. While Ḥayy was able to reason his way through some of the mysteries of the universe on account of his *fiṭra*, the islanders' deficiency in *fiṭra* is what prevents them from appreciating or understanding his account of his knowledge.[80]

What we can see from this discussion then, is that Ibn Ṭufayl uses *fiṭra* at very particular junctures in the text and with a seeming awareness of its proper meaning and function. All these instances are within a context of intellectual capability, either highlighting distinction or deficiency. That use, the introduction suggests,[81] is in continuation with the works of those Ibn Ṭufayl sees as his predecessor. The fact that he distinguishes *fiṭra* from a mere nature or way of creation and yet sets it in parallel with such ideas as the mind or senses affirms the contextual impression of an intellectual sense of the Qur'ani concept. In short, in employing *fiṭra,* Ibn Ṭufayl points us to what he sees as the difference between the exceptional sage and the masses, as well as the nature of this difference. An intellectual gulf that, as we will see now, turns out to be unbridgeable, separates them.

ii) An unbridgeable intellectual gulf

That this intellectual gulf that *fiṭra* points at is unbridgeable and, as such, carries political implications, becomes apparent at the very end of the tale. For after reaching the last stage of his

[80] According to Nadja Germann "Ḥayy's inborn capabilities as Ibn Ṭufayl describes them corresponds to what Avicenna would characterize as prophetic" ("Philosophizing without Philosophy," *Recherches de Theologie et Philosophie Medievales* 75, no. 2 (2008): 281) because he is in touch with the active intellect and can attain knowledge to an astounding extent. However, many others dispute this idea, noting that Ḥayy—as the ending shows—lacks the essential charisma of a prophet and is thus unable to sway the masses (see for example Hani Nasri, "The Mystic and Society according to Ibn Bajjah and Ibn Ṭufayl," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1986): 223-27). For a more mystical reading of *fiṭra,* speaking of it as an affinity for spiritual enlightenment, see Salman Bashier, *The Story of Islamic Philosophy,* 38.

[81] And we can confirm this at this point in the dissertation.

spiritual journey, the author does not relieve Ḥayy through the death he longs for. If the work's mere purpose had been to present the philosophical system of Avicennism or the mystical possibilities of a special human being to the ruler, Ibn Ṭufayl could have ended his account here. Instead, the story presents its protagonist and readers with a tension for the life so carefully stripped of all earthly concern through the introduction of Absāl, Salāmān, and the islanders. [82] For one, Ḥayy is initially interested in—if not intrigued by—the newcomer. He thus appears to be breaking with an attitude we might describe as contemptuous of the world and all its physical realities at worst, or merely accepting the world as a necessary evil at best. As we saw, the first part of the story, which focuses on Ḥayy in his solitary status, does not speak about questions of the political role of the philosopher, the place of revealed religion in the life of all human beings, and the purpose of human society. However, this changes once Absāl and the islanders enter into the picture and it is engagement with these issues that the latter half of my chapter focuses on. We will see that as soon as Absāl relates to him the existence of a messenger, his character, and ideas, Ḥayy is interested (initially, at the very least) in taking on some of his demands. But do he or Absāl keep to the religious law once they have left society again? The final glimpse we get of the life of the two hermits is one of deep mystical contemplation, comparable to Ḥayy's state before the arrival of Absāl.[83] While the tale appears to suggest that the demands of revealed religion are compatible with Ḥayy's own life and even necessary for the life of the masses, it is not clear if they are the necessary or divinely preferred means of devotion for all humans. In what follows I will attempt

[82] On the question of language, Jim Colville wonders, "how the sophisticated, systematic thinking displayed by Ḥayy could be accomplished without language" (*Two Andalusian Philosophers*, viii).

[83] As I will elaborate below, Ibn Ṭufayl's description of their life at the end suggests that both Ḥayy and Absāl take on Ḥayy's purely meditative lifestyle, focusing on God alone and thus reaching conjunction: "Ḥayy searched for his ecstasy as he had before, until once again it came" (ET in Goodman, 165). No mention is made of any prescriptions; rather, as we know from the way Ḥayy previously had reached that stage, such mystical heights are the result of a complete shedding of all outward concerns. Such a reading would fit in with the explicitly statements made at the end, claiming that the prescriptions of the prophet are for the masses and not for the exceptional, *and thus by necessity* solitary, philosopher.

to spell out some of what Ibn Ṭufayl believes true for those of exceptional and deficient *fiṭra* with respect to the status of the philosophical life, revealed religion, and society.[84]

Ibn Ṭufayl twice throws a searching light onto the question of the place of revelation and philosophy in human lives. For one, from the side of Ḥayy's life, in which revelation and its injunctions do play a role but do so within the framework of Ḥayy's journey of autodidactic discovery. There are ways in which, notably during his phase of imitation of the celestial bodies, the demands he imposes upon himself resemble religious obligations: he keeps himself clean, he circles around his house, and, of course, focuses his entire existence ultimately on God through mediation and fasting. However, the text does not mention more detailed obligations: we do not hear of prayer in terms of prostration, nor of specific dietary laws or slaughtering with an eye to ritual prescriptions. Of course, his efforts extend beyond what most people take on, given that his entire life is structured around reaching spiritual heights.[85] Yet, revelation or divine injunctions do not show up in Ḥayy's life. Instead, he performs what he believes to be appropriate actions based on his growing understanding of God and his desire to emulate him. But these are ideas and rules he himself has discovered. Moreover, as Ḥayy climbs the latter of spiritual enlightenment, he comes to abandon his own rules of conduct, fully committing himself to a life of contemplation. The general message seems to be that neither, religious or philosophical concerns, exclude the other and that instead, there is (though it seems a temporary) room for both in the life of the self-taught sage. From a pedagogical perspective there seems to be no question that Ḥayy is able to

[84] On the idea that the messenger's religion for Ḥayy is merely a crutch see Colville, *Two Andalusian Philosophers,* xv. He also notes the close relation of this kind of argument to the thought of Ibn Rushd in his *Definitive Statement* (ibid.). On the relation between Ibn Bājja's thought, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd more broadly see Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 21-24.

[85] We may note that the only explicit nod to legal concerns appears during the traditional account of Ḥayy's birth, when the narrator notes that his father married his mother "secretly, but lawfully, according to their rite" (ET in Goodman, 105).

reach knowledge of God by himself and without any messengers. In fact, his knowledge even surpasses that of most.

Ḥayy's encounter with Absāl in the last part of the tale confirms the impression that first of all, religious obligations are compatible with philosophy.[86] When Absāl, the man who will eventually become Ḥayy's companion, comes to the island, he seems engaged in some form of devotion. We see him "worshipping, magnifying, and sanctifying God."[87] Despite the fact that he consciously chose to leave society he clearly continues to relate to God in a certain way, though we are not told whether this way is the one of revealed religion. Similarly, once the two men find a common language, Absāl tells Ḥayy about the "obligations and acts of worship" that the messenger of God, who had brought religion to the island for the first time, had prescribed. And while Ḥayy's own thoughts had led him to see the life of contemplation as his ultimate obligation, he now learns of more distinct religious obligations. We are told, then, that "Ḥayy accepted these"—and we can infer that means prayers, alms tax, fasting, and pilgrimage—"and other such outward practices" and that he "undertook to observe them."[88] He does so because the one who brought these demands, "had given a faithful picture and spoken truly" in his descriptions and so Ḥayy feels obligated to follow these injunctions.[89] Although Ibn Ṭufayl does not specify the exact relation of the sage to the prescriptions of established religion, the initial encounter between Ḥayy and Absāl suggests that there is a role for the worship of God in their isolated life and that there is no apparent or strong conflict between Ḥayy's discoveries and Absāl's traditions.

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[86] By this I mean that it is not clear if the messenger's revealed path is God's preferred way for all human beings; and also whether, if the sages can see themselves freed from some of the rules governing property, they are also to be understood as free from the rules of religious observance.

[87] ET in Goodman, 157.

[88] Ibid., 161. There is general agreement that the religion Absāl speaks of is Islam (see for example, Michael Marmura, "The Islamic Philosophers' Conception of Islam," in *Islam's Understanding of Itself,* ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis Jr. (Malibu: Udena Publications, 1983), 87-102.

[89] ET in Goodman, 161. In fact, "he held himself responsible to practice these things in obedience to the command of one whose truthfulness he could not doubt" (ibid.).

In this vein, the commentator informs us explicitly that Ḥayy concludes, after learning from the newcomer about the religion of the prophet, that "none of it [is] in contradiction with what he had seen for himself from his supernatural vantage point."[90] Further, it does not seem as if Absāl's ritual approach to the truth is less in his eyes.[91] Ḥayy acknowledges that he does not understand the nature of revealed religion, wondering why "this prophet rel[ied] for the most part on symbols to portray the divine world […] instead of simply revealing the truth."[92] He wonders, for instance, "why did he confine himself to these particular rituals and duties and allow the amassing of wealth and overindulgence in eating,"[93] neglecting what Ḥayy perceives to be the higher truth. Connected to and in line with his total 'poverty' he cannot fathom "all the provisions of the Law to do with money […], with all their statutory and discretionary penalties."[94] Both the shape that religion takes and the existence of laws regulating life, and especially property, are in this estimation the outgrowth of a misleading approach to the truth.[95] Yet he dismisses neither the messenger nor his message. Rather, Ḥayy takes on the requirements and does find them agreeable, suggesting that there is a place for a particular, maybe autodidactic form of worship that is able to incorporate the religious obligations revealed by the messenger. However, while the relation between worship and the exceptional sage is thus one of compatibility and integration, Ḥayy soon understands that for the masses the messenger's conception of worship does and must occupy and much more prominent position. Additionally, his own approach to the divine will be shown as not accessible to the majority of people.

[90] ET in Goodman, 161.
[91] It is, of course, not clear (as is the case in any of my arguments) how Ibn Ṭufayl's own views relate to the narrator or Ḥayy here.
[92] ET in Goodman, 161.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 161f.
[95] The focus on property here is very interesting and I am not entirely sure what to do with it.

Once Ḥayy does encounter the islanders, Ibn Ṭufayl casts the question of the role of different forms of worship for humanity in a different light. The reader and Ḥayy equally learn that the relation between philosophy and religion goes beyond a mere compatibility. Rather, those that live in society, namely the masses, do indeed need revelation's religious and legal injunctions as well as the (symbolic) language they are couched in. They are—on the basis of their *fiṭra*—unable to grasp what Ḥayy seeks to disclose to them. For when Ḥayy discovers that even the most capable of them are unable to receive his account of the truth, that "any attempt to impose a higher task on them was bound to fail,"[96] he realizes that the "sole benefit" of religion for most people "was for this world, in that it helped them lead decent lives without others encroaching on what belonged to them."[97] Revelation and its ritual and legal obligations hold the masses in check while "only very few win the true happiness."[98] While he initially thought that it would be much better if "people understood things as they really are" and thus "seek the Truth,"[99] Ḥayy now sees the wisdom behind the messenger's approach. In line with what we saw with respect to the deficiencies of most people in *fiṭra,* the encounter with the islanders teaches Ḥayy that what he thought of as unnecessarily veiled religious content and overly practical rules was already the maximum of what most people could handle. He realizes that "all wisdom and guidance, all that could possibly help them was contained already in the words of the prophets and the religious traditions."[100] He in fact had nothing to add or change about what he saw in society.

[96] ET in Goodman, 164.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid. I do not think we should read this reference (or the one to a 'sole benefit') as derogatory. Nothing in the tale suggests that revealed religion is a lesser approach, especially considering Ḥayy's own willingness to take it on, as well as the fact that he assures the islanders regarding their right path before his departure (see below). Clearly, it is through adhering to the messenger's demands that the best of the islanders gain salvation and it seems that the lowest are at least held in check by its rules, if nothing else.
[99] ET in Goodman, 162.
[100] Ibid., 164.

Realizing all of this, our protagonist lets go of his original plan of enlightening the people. Instead, he goes to Salāmān and his "aspiring"[101] group "and apologiz[es]" for what he had told them.[102] He claims to be the one at fault and he even "advises them to closely attach themselves to the obligations of the punishments of the revelation (*hudūd al-sharʿ*) and the outward activities."[103] Far from being antinomian, Ḥayy goes as far as to warn them of change:[104] they ought to take care "not to embark onto things that do not concern them" and "avoid innovation (*bidaʾa*) and heretic tendencies."[105] Instead, he calls them to "emulate the righteous forefathers and "leave modern matters."[106] Finally, he "orders them to avoid what the multitude of people [do, that is] neglect of the religious law (*sharīʿa*) and an interest in the world."[107] Abandoning his high-flying plans for teaching the islanders, Ḥayy has realized the necessary and sufficient role of the messenger in their lives. While his self-taught approach to God appears to go deeper, beyond the symbols of revealed religion and its injunctions, such an approach is indeed unsuitable for the majority of people. While philosophy and religion are compatible, they address themselves to different kinds of people and through different means. And, by implication, if appears that neither of the two approaches and its pedagogical methods is appropriate for the other group.[108]

[101] ET in Goodman, 165.
[102] Ibid., 164.
[103] AR in Gauthier, 153.
[104] Taneli Kukkonen puts it as follows: "Ḥayy affirms that there is nothing to add or take away from the letter of the law: every true religion not only provides a sensible approximation of the truths attained by the intellectual seeker, but the optimal presentation of it for non-philosophers" (*Ibn Ṭufayl: Living the Life of Reason* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 125). It seems what one can only hope for is a philosophically inclined disciple; in this way, Kukkonen believes, *Ḥayy* acts as an invitation.
[105] AR in Gauthier, 153f.
[106] AR in Gauthier, 154.
[107] Ibid. Again, a third category of people seems to emerge, different from the islanders and their aspirations and rather marked by full conformity to the world.
[108] Here Ibn Ṭufayl's tale illustrates very well al-Fārābī's arguments regarding the nature and role of religion in the lives of different people (arguments that, as we saw, build upon his conception and use of an intellectual and differing *fiṭra* as well).

IV. The Ethics of *Fitra*

As I have argued above, based on Ibn Ṭufayl's conception and use of *fiṭra* his philosophical tale can be seen to illustrate aspects of the *falāsifa*'s approach to *fiṭra* (including its political import). One question that particular occupied my engagement with al-Fārābī was that of the ethical content of *fiṭra.* Now as we can see from the analysis section of this chapter, the uses of *fiṭra* in Ibn Ṭufayl's tale show little connection to knowledge that we would largely describe as theological or even ethical. Instead, we found *fiṭra* describing an ability/capacity to grasp something or have insight, as the examples of the heavenly bodies or Ḥayy's efforts to teach the islanders showed. Similarly, the tale made no explicit connection between Ḥayy's discovery of God's existence, his oneness, or his mercy and *fiṭra.* However, since his exceptional *fiṭra* is what sets him apart and allows for his difficult reasoning in the astronomical example, it seems that this knowledge, like all his knowledge, has to do with his particular abilities. By extension, inquiry into Ḥayy's attitudes and behavior towards himself, others, and God—regardless of explicit references—will help us understand the kind of content of that he acribes to *fiṭra* better.

From the beginning (and seemingly consciously so) Ḥayy has a desire to help and in line with that he shows feelings of empathy and pity. We can see this clearly in his interactions with his aging foster mother. As the doe grows older and weaker, "he would lead her to rich pastures and gather sweet fruits to feed her."[109] After she passes Ḥayy is "beside himself with grief" and his "soul seemed to overflow with sorrow."[110] A strong desire to help her, make her better again overtakes him and eventually prompts him to examine her body and that of other animals. However, despite his original motivation by tender feelings, his desire for assistance leads him to

[109] ET in Goodman, 111.
[110] Ibid.

a dissection of his foster mother[111] and even other animals in vivisections.[112] While certainly cruel by our scientific standards, it is not clear whether we can make much of the vivisections within Ibn Ṭufayl's context. [113] Instead, it is noteworthy that Ḥayy does eventually bury his mother, after observing that practice between two birds.[114] Additionally, his mother's death is not merely the occasion to reflect and explore bodies but also prompts him to be "friendly to the deer, treating them more kindly for their likeness to his mother."[115] While we are not told whether Ḥayy was unfriendly to the deer before,[116] the next stage in his development—the discovery of fire—means he moves to a meat diet.[117] Additionally, he wears animal skins and hair and generally begins to rise above them, domesticating riding animals and establishing his superiority over them.[118] We might thus describe this phase of early interactions between Ḥayy and the animals as complex: between pity and tender feelings towards some, a sense of domination and power over others.

At this rather early stage of his development I hence find it hard to ascribe to Ḥayy any ethical conscience or even strong interest in the world around him. We can say that he experiences feelings of pain, pity, fear, and a desire for self-defense and even domination. Yet overall, it seems Ḥayy's interactions with the other creatures are in constant flux and based upon immediate experiences and an increasing growth of knowledge. A desire to help is the beginning of a process of dissection, the discovery of fire creates an interest in meat, and hunting, which in in turn provides skins for his body. At the same time original separation from the animals as a young boy

[111] ET in Goodman, 113.
[112] Ibid., 117.
[113] And unlike the boy in *Don Antonio,* Ḥayy does not vivisect for pleasure but to discover the soul (cf. ET in Goodman, 34) and eventually God (ibid., 35). For an extended comparison of the two works see Muhammad N. Hasan, "A Study in Eighteenth-Century Plagiarism," *Islamic Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1983): 31-48.
[114] ET in Goodman, 115.
[115] Ibid.
[116] We merely know that as a young boy, some of the animals bothered him and in turn, he develops ways to defend himself (cf. ET in Goodman, 110).
[117] Cf. ET in Goodman, 116.
[118] Cf. ibid., 118.

(presumably from weakness) turns into friendliness as a heritage from his dead mother; but this again changes when he establishes his superiority as a threat to the other animals through his desire for dissection first, and meat later. While there is also, during this first stage, no reference to *fiṭra,* the most we can say about the exceptional Ḥayy's relation to the world is that it is immediate, based on feelings and the experience of desires, as well as a growing sense of superiority at the apex of divine creation.

In a second stage of development, once he has come to know of God's existence, Ḥayy does turn to a proper treatment of the world and creatures around him as part of a regimented scheme of imitation. However, it is very clear that he does so for his own spiritual progress.[119] That his care for others is not motivated abstractly is clear from a passage that precedes his scheme of conscious efforts to fashion himself after the animals, stars, or God. Before thinking of his regime of imitation, Ḥayy had discovered that God is "most good and merciful."[120] While this recognition leads him to attribute all the goodness he sees to the maker and his "overflowing abundance and liberality,"[121] this does not prompt him to any good actions. Rather he sees his own status as ranking at the top of the maker's perfections, without creating any obligations for himself. While seeing God's goodness in everything around him does deepen "his love of Him," the result of such a love is not a care for or interest in the world but rather a total "detach[ment] of his heart from the sensory world, and binding it to the world of mind."[122] What he seeks—instead of good relations with the divine creatures or the like—is most direct access to that God, or constant

[119] For a discussion of Ḥayy's different proofs of God's existence see Hawi, "Ibn Tufayl: On the Existence of God," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95, no.1 (1975): 58-67.
[120] ET in Goodman, 134.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 135.

"awareness without distraction."[123] The key insight of divine existence and goodness sparks essentially an ascetic, most high ideal: a never-ceasing focus on the divine.

A second stage begins when Ḥayy reflects upon himself and realizes that he is a composite creature that resembles the animals in his lower half and the celestial bodies and the divine in his upper. From this recognition, an obligation for imitation emerges[124] and it is this desire for imitation that characterizes this second stage of ethical development. It is this phase that is marked by a heightened focus on how he relates to his surroundings. Seeing the composite nature of his body, having both lower animalistic instincts and higher thoughts he develops a tri-partite scheme of obligation that commands "three forms of mimesis."[125] It includes resembling "an inarticulate animal", "a celestial body", and the "necessarily Existent Being."[126] However, we should not forget, that this structure was ultimately motivated by a desire to be able to sustain a constant awareness of God through imitating the heavenly bodies. Thus the text reiterates that Ḥayy has learned that "his ultimate happiness and triumph over misery would be won only if he could make his awareness of the Necessary Existent so continuous that nothing could distract him from it for an instant."[127] Unlike the first stage and its very immediate reactions to feelings of pity or fear, the second stage is dominated by Ḥayy's desire for mimesis in order to reach his ultimate goal, unceasing awareness of the Necessary Existent. Thus, while this second stage is characterized by concern for the world, it seems quite explicitly motivated by Ḥayy's own spiritual standing and progress.

[123] ET in Goodman, 138.
[124] Cf. ibid., 142.
[125] ET in Goodman, 143.
[126] Ibid., 142.
[127] Ibid.

The remark that the first of those imitations, namely of the animals, does in fact "hinder the experience and distract him from it, since it meant handling sensory things,"[128] strengthens the impression that the scheme of obligation through mimesis is primarily a means to his own spiritual ends. While this aspect is needed to "preserve the spirit,"[129] it is only a necessary evil, sustaining him and thus required "despite its inherent drawbacks."[130] Nevertheless, these spiritually focused efforts have real-life consequences for the creatures around him. One of the implications of this God-focused mode of interaction is to severely limit his food intake in an effort to reduce dependence on the body. But another implication is that Ḥayy orders his food since he is concerned with the impact of his own choices on God's creation. For feeding on fruits and vegetables means he would "unavoidably cut them off from their own fulfilment and prevent them all from achieving their intended purpose,"[131] which in turn meant "opposition to the work of the Creator."[132] Hence he establishes an order, eating within clearly set limits first the "most readily to hand" vegetarian foods,[133] and if they were not available "he must eat meat or eggs."[134] In everything he is " careful to take only from the most abundant and not root our whole species"[135] and thus, by our modern standards of sustainability, really reduces his harmful impact on the environment.[136] In line with his food choices, Ḥayy only looks for the basic clothes and housing, necessary "for keeping alive the vital spirit."[137] There are thus very clearly positive effects to Ḥayy's spiritual regime or a

[128] ET in Goodman, 143.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid., 144.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 145.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibn Ṭufayl explains that the extreme care is intended to avoid damage to the forms of any group of plants or animals, so not to extinct them (ET in Goodman, 88). Thus, he does so not out of ecological concerns but mirrors the celestial bodies that "prepare matter for the reception of the forms emanating from the Necessary Being" (ibid., 89).
[137] ET in Goodman, 145.

certain positive effect of his concern with attaining perfect awareness of God. In this vein this first phase of the second stage of his development thus forcefully underlines that despite all the care, "his supreme goal was [the] third form of mimesis"[138] or concentrating on God alone, with the hope of the self eventually vanishing.

Moving to the next phase of imitation, namely the celestial bodies, Ḥayy becomes even more engaged with the world around him. Analyzing the heavenly bodies' properties, he sees their three aspects: their relation to the world by tending to it through warmth, cooling and thus preparing "the world for the outpouring of spirit-forms upon it from the Necessarily Existent Creator;"[139] their own properties such as "transparency, luminescence, purity from all taint, and transcendence of all tarnish, [and] their circular motion;"[140] and finally their relation to God through "continuous, undistracted awareness of Him, their longing for Him, [and] their total submission to His rule and devoted execution of His will."[141] Hoping to imitate the heavenly bodies in all aspects, this stage of imitation means that Ḥayy is hyper-focused on the environment: he never allows "to see any plant or animal hurt, sick, encumbered, or in need without helping it if he could."[142] All of God's creation is meticulously tended to and this this means making sure all plants have access to sunlight and water and that the animals are nourished and safe. The second characteristic of the heavenly bodies means that Ḥayy tends to himself: "Ḥayy made sure always to be clean" from head to toe,[143] including his teeth and clothes and even smelling pleasantly. The desire for the characteristics of the heavenly bodies even goes so far that Hayy emulates the stars' circular motion, whether by circling the island, his house, or merely himself. While the motivation

[138] ET in Goodman, 143.
[139] Ibid., 145.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 145f.
[142] Ibid., 146.
[143] Ibid.

is clearly still to attain his spiritual goal, this time through imitation of the heavenly bodies, this second phase has very positive side-effects for the world. It is important to highlight that unlike the first stage of mere reactions and feelings, and the positive side-effects of the first phase of the second stage, Ḥayy's middle phase is one of deep concern for the plants and animals surrounding him. It is noteworthy that—unlike his other stages or even other stranded figures of later literature—he has this period of active care for and concern with the environment and all that lives in it (including himself).

However, this heightened attention to others and himself reaches a sudden end when he comes to the third phase of imitation and the last stage of his relationship with the world around him.[144] For while he integrated the third aspect of the heavenly bodies' focus on God into his other routine of spinning (and presumably also into his care for himself and the world around him) by attempting to "cut away the bonds of all objects of the senses,"[145] he was engaged in a constant battle between "the drives of his body"[146] and its transcendence. But when he models himself on the Necessarily Existent (in the last phase), he aims at a full transcendence of physicality. This physicality to avoid explicitly includes the circular motions and also "his compassion and solicitude for animals and plants and his eagerness to remove anything that hampered them."[147] The problem in all efforts is that they are "characteristic of the physical:"[148] the world around him

[144] However, Robert Switzer notes the nevertheless high regard for the environment compared to Crusoe. Thus he points out that Ḥayy "does not in the end wish to dominate and control nature so much as to care for it, to sustain it, to revere it as the work of God, and to interfere with it as little as possible" ("The Place of Nature in *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and *Robinson Crusoe,*" in *Culture and the Natural Environment: Ancient and Modern Middle Eastern Texts,* ed. Sharif S. Elmusa (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 69). Nevertheless, there is also a darker side to the tale since "nature and physicality in general are very often denigrated, even despised- as mere body; as impure, changing, and subject to desires and to decay" (ibid.). Thus, he summarizes that "when nature is respected and cared for, it is in the name of God, the Eternal Craftsman who made it; it is not once presented as having intrinsic worth." Most importantly, "there is no compunction, at various stages in Ḥayy's development at least, against using it, even to the point of torturing living things in the name of scientific knowledge" (ibid., 69f).
[145] ET in Goodman, 146.
[146] Ibid., 147.
[147] Ibid., 148.
[148] Ibid.

would not have been the object of his concern "without using a corporeal faculty"[149] and helping them also "required use of his bodily powers."[150] Now that physicality has been identified as hindering his goal, Ḥayy fully retreats into his cave, fully focused on God alone.[151] The phase of engagement is over, having entered a phase of complete discipline. As indicative already in the earliest musings on God's existence, what Ḥayy strives for overall is the realization of his goal of constant awareness. And while all previous phases might have been necessary preparations towards this goal, now that physicality is what pulls him down, he must abandon all associations with the world. Eventually Ḥayy does reach union with God, although first falling into the trap of thinking himself one with God—a last residue from his attachment to earthly categories.[152]

While these three stages of engagement with the world seem fairly clear in their overall orientation to Ḥayy's ultimate goal, the encounter with other humans makes the vision of Ḥayy's phases as mere stepping-stones to an eventual spiritual fulfilment complex. Until Absāl enters the tale it seemed as if conjunction with God through a beatific vision is the end of his journey towards perfection and the motivation behind his all his actions, even those most clearly focused on the world around him. As we said, once Ḥayy has reached that state, engagement with the world is at an absolute minimum: the basic needs of his body[153] are the only thing pulling him towards the present and even this is a burden that in his eyes only death can relieve[154]. However, after reaching the last stage the tale does not relieve Ḥayy with death. Rather, it presents a tension for the life so carefully stripped of all earthly concern through the introduction of Absāl, Salāmān, and the

[149] ET in Goodman, 148.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Interestingly, Ibn Ṭufayl does not provide commentary on whether he agrees or disagrees with any of those steps as necessary or good. There is simply a retelling of all the stages Ḥayy lives through and his ultimate reaching of conjunction.
[152] Cf. ET in Goodman, 150.
[153] Cf. ibid., 155.
[154] Cf. ibid., 156.

islanders. [155] Ḥayy is interested in—if not intrigued by—the newcomer and thus appears to break with an attitude we might describe as contemptuous of the world and all its physical realities at worst, merely accepting the world as a necessary evil at best .

Thus, we learn that rather than merely dismissive or seeking to ignore him, Ḥayy is painfully aware of his temptations and distractions from his routine because of the other person's presence and his pleasurable food:

> The moment he tasted how good it was, Ḥayy knew he had done wrong to violate his pledged dietary restrictions. He regretted what he had done and wanted to get away from Absāl and devote himself to his true purpose, a return to sublimity. But this time the divine vision[156] would not come so readily. It seemed best to remain in the sense-world with Absāl until he had found out so much about him that he no longer felt any interest in him.[157]

Based on the above understanding of Ḥayy's ultimate goal, we might thus say that his interest in Absāl is subject to his efforts to attain the highest goal, in this case removing obstacles that keep him from his meditation. Hence while we see Ḥayy moved by pity (he "deeply pitied mankind"[158]) upon hearing about the islanders and their lifestyle, we could read his desire to help as primarily motived by his hope that it would be "through *him* that they would be saved."[159] This way the concern for others would be merely expressive of his scheme for self-development, whether it includes saving the islanders or interacting with Absāl. Such a reading would be in continuation

[155] On the question of language, Jim Colville wonders "how the sophisticated, systematic thinking displayed by Ḥayy could be accomplished without language" (*Two Andalusian Philosophers*, viii). Bashier also notes Ḥayy's exceptional ability for thought before language, contrasting it with al-Fārābī, who denied the ability of humans to think before speech (*The Story of Islamic Philosophy,* 83).
[156] Goodman translates *al-mushāhada* with 'ecstasy' though the Arabic more clearly refers to a visionary experience, invoking ideas of a beatific vision.
[157] ET in Goodman, 159f. There is a clear invocation of the Qurʾānic account of Qur'an 7: 22 here, comparing Adam and Eve's tasting of the tree to Ḥayy's testing of Absāl's food. But rather than fallen from innocence and recognize that he was naked (which Ḥayy had very early on in the story), Ḥayy is ashamed of breaking his own promise to himself, namely his dietary restrictions. Might the implication be that society is a state fallen from innocence, a conglomerate of those living in the world by constituting it? I am indebted to Muhammad Q. Zaman for noting this parallel in the Arabic.
[158] ET in Goodman, 162.
[159] Ibid. (my emphasis).

with the end of the story, when Ḥayy realizes that that there would be no help for the islanders, causing him and Absāl to return "to their own island."[160]

However, it is not clear to me, at this stage, whether it is the 'him' that matters here, meaning Ḥayy's playing a part in their salvation, or rather the fact that Ḥayy cared for others and their eternal destinies. Ḥayy is intrigued by Absāl, learns language from him, and cannot be prevented from seeking out the islanders and bringing the truth to them. There is certainly a reemergence of the strong feelings characteristic of the protagonist's earliest stage of development. Yet there seems to be more, a certainly pull that Absāl and greater human sociality exert over our hermit. It seems desire to leave the island and meet others is expressive of the exact tension the entire encounter, if not Ḥayy's overall relation to the world, hints at; between a disturbance from complete asceticism by the physical world and a human curiosity and concern for the life surrounding us.

The outward concerns of Ḥayy, the man with the exceptional *fiṭra,* are thus as interesting as they are complex. For one there is a clear as basic sense of pity or concern—along with other feelings—from his young age to the end. As to the source of it we are not informed. Though, as with all, the set-up implies it is natural to him. Besides this feeling of pity, however, Ḥayy's actions seem especially focused on survival and exploration, positive implications of his dietary restrictions notwithstanding. I do not think we can ascribe much ethical content to his *fiṭra.* With his imitation of the heavenly bodies, we see a sudden surge in care for himself and the world around him. Though this care and concern is explicitly motivated by his ultimate goal, a divine connection, it is an important stage in his development, and one characterized by an extreme form of other regard. When he moves to the next step necessary in pursuit of this goal, this care is fully

[160] ET in Goodman, 165.

abandoned. Yet, after reaching the highest heights, social interaction brought about by the episode with the islanders is introduced into the carefully crafted life of the hermit. Ḥayy's interactions with Absāl, his desire to leave the island and help bring the truth to other humans, and his return to isolation is full of tension. [161] It is not clear whether this extreme move away from divine contemplation is ultimately the outgrowth of a concern for his spiritual goals or rather expressive of a deep concern for others, an interest in or even pull towards social life and broader human community. While it is difficult to make a definitive statement regarding Ḥayy's ethics, this topic has moved us to the last concern of this chapter: the political implications of the tale's portrayal of the relation between Ḥayy—with his exceptional *fiṭra*—and other human beings, especially those of lesser *fiṭra*.

V. The Politics of *Fiṭra* and the Need for the Messenger

The first part of the story, which focuses on Ḥayy in his solitary status, does not speak about questions of broader human society. However, once Absāl and the islanders enter into the picture, we are offered a number of explicit and implicit points by way of commentary on the status of revealed law and religion. We learn that revelation, in its religious and legal injunctions, addresses itself primarily to the life of the masses, the people of deficient *fiṭra* as we previously learned. While Ḥayy originally had set out to teach the masses, we see him come around to reality

[161] These observations regarding the limited interest appear to make sense given the particular circumstances of Ḥayy's life and birth. Potentially cut loose from any human association by generation and living in absolute isolation we might say we can see Ḥayy live out an extreme form of self-perfection in pursuit of his highest goal. In this vein, we see Germann speak of Ḥayy as "highly individual, elite and perfection-oriented" ("Philosophizing without Philosophy," 301). Additionally, Kukkonen notes the Aristotelian idea of becoming what you are as the highest perfection as present in *Ḥayy* and describes his outlook as "perfectionist", a "virtue ethics […] of personal excellence" (*Ibn Ṭufayl: Living the Life of Reason,* 93). Finally, Idris speaks of "an ethic of caring for himself" ("Ibn Ṭufayl's Critique of Politics," 85). He believes an anti-care message at work since "Ibn Ṭufayl shows how a politics of compassion can interrupt the network of care it seeks to engender and maintain: compassion can subvert one's ability to care for himself, of others' abilities to care for themselves, and most importantly, subvert itself" (ibid., 86).

at the end of the tale: the integrative approach to God is in fact not right for everyone. Instead, as his encounter with the brightest of the masses has made him aware people "could be saved only in their own way."[162] He was not making people better by disclosing his knowledge; rather, he made them worse, causing them to stumble and inciting them to leave the path appropriate to them.[163] Thus while Ḥayy is served best by leaving the island and returning to his pursuits, it is better for the islanders to continue on their approach. This way, he believes, "they would win salvation and be amongst the righteous."[164] The message here, as Goodman notes, takes its clues from Qur'an 56 and affirms that both the exceptionally gifted sage and the masses would be saved; and, by implication, that Ḥayy was wrong in his initial idea of delivering the truth as he knew it to a broader group. Both the compatibility of Absāl's account of the messenger and the encounter with the islanders suggest that the path Ḥayy has taken is to be seen as compatible with revelation. Yet rather than a real alternative for most humans, the distinction by *fiṭar* and the failed teaching experiment show that while some people are very special and can indeed relate differently to the truth of God (namely directly and through autodidactism), their life is an exception and—for the sake of all—lived out in isolation. There is a way for the elect and one for the masses; and that of the elect does not benefit the masses. What, however, is not clear in this is the reverse: whether the revealed way that is the best for the masses might also do some good, or even obligatory, for the exceptional such as Ḥayy and Absāl. [165] Put differently, is revealed religion just for the deficient or indeed beneficial or binding for all, even those that can relate to God philosophically?

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[162] ET in Goodman, 165.

[163] "Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān and his friend Absāl now knew that even this aspiring group fell short and could be save only in their own way. If ever they were to venture beyond their present level to the vantage point of insight, what they had would be shattered, and even so they would be unable to reach the level of the blessed. They would waver and slip and their end would be all worse" (ET in Goodman, 165).

[164] ET in Goodman, 165.

[165] The figure of Absāl poses an interesting challenge here. The text never mentions the status of his *fiṭra* but he seems to occupy something of a middle ground between Ḥayy and the islanders. For one, he initially leaves the island to live in spiritual seclusion and thus clearly has some higher, mystical way of relating to God that he seeks out. Yet, it is he

We know that the argument that revelation and its legal and religious injunctions "are adjusted to the lowermost level of the human species […] since this level is represented by the vast majority of mankind," is a common one among the *falāsifa* from al-Fārābī to Ibn Rushd.[166] As Michael Marmura puts it, it is the claim that religion is "the imitation of philosophy, with its corollary that the majority of mankind must not be addressed in philosophical language."[167] In Ibn Ṭufayl's case, we saw that the message of the prophet and his structuring of human life in this world are the best source of direction for the life of the masses. This claim is not to deny that those who follow the law and the prophets do not also reap other-worldly benefits. Yet as the use of *fiṭra* pointed us to and as the life story of the exceptional Ḥayy and his slightly less capable companion show, reaching God is possible beyond society, beyond the order of law, and the prescriptions of revealed religion. And while this life of philosophy might not only resemble religious worship initially but even be compatible with it at a later point, it is not clear whether revelation really plays a role in Ḥayy's life after the initial encounter with Absāl. Meaning, does he, or ought he also, keep the religious prescriptions Absāl introduced him to after he returns to the life of contemplation he was living before?[168] Is the messenger, so crucial in the lives of others, not only compatible but necessarily salvific to a philosopher like Ḥayy?

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who tells Ḥayy about the prophet and thus at least appears to be still invested in the revelation and its demands. What happens to that attitude after his and Ḥayy's return to the island at the end of the tale though is not clear. All we learn is that Absāl is able to reach his teacher's spiritual heights or at least get close to him. For one, he can thus be taught; something that was impossible for the islanders because of their deficient *fiṭra.* However, since we never actually hear about Absāl's status, the overall point of this chapter remains, namely the recognition that what matters to Ibn Ṭufayl is to underline the impossibility of philosophical exceptionals to disrupt the role of revelation in the life of the masses.

[166] Bürgel, "'Symbols and Hints:' Some Considerations Concerning the Meaning of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*," in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl,* 128.

[167] "The Islamic Philosophers' Conception of Islam," 97. He agrees with my suggestion that we should see *Ḥayy* as a "dramatic illustration of al-Fārābī's theory that revealed religion is the imitation of philosophy and the dictum that philosophy must be confined to the few capable of understanding" (ibid., 99). This is a line of thought already picked up by Ibn Sīnā, for whom "religion gives philosophical truth in the language of image and symbol" (ibid., 98), and one which culminates in Ibn Rushd.

[168] On the question of Ibn Ṭufayl's connection to Sufism see Vincent Cornell's uncovering of Ibn Ṭufayl's Sufi lineage, having studied with ʾAbu'l-Hasan ibn ʿAbbād, whose teacher was a student of Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 1126), the brother of ʾAbū Hāmid al-Ghazālī ("Understanding is the Mother of Ability: Responsibility and Action in the Doctrine of Ibn

The tale itself does not resolve the question of the universality of the messenger. We saw that after Ḥayy's initial, self-styled worship he encounters revealed religion through Absāl and comes to learn its compatibility with his own previous convictions, as well as its salvific and pedagogical role in the life of the masses. However, we do not get any good indication as to the way Ḥayy (or even Absāl) relates to the messenger post his encounter with the islanders. Does he continue with his initial adoption of the ritual law, meaning he believes himself subject to the demands placed on the masses by revealed religion despite his philosophical approach? Some questions of ordinary religious obligation, of course, his life choice prohibits: there is no purpose to alms or the possibility of going on pilgrimage. And naturally the question arises if some concerns, such as the prohibition to steal or commit adultery, would apply to Ḥayy were he in a context where either of these were possible. Finally, the life Ḥayy was living just before Absāl's arrival was one of utter inactivity, a quiet contemplation of the divine free from any movement, nutrition, or outward regard of any kind. It is this life that the two of them eventually return to, though Ibn Ṭufayl does not deny or affirm the exact shape of their lives.[169] In the broader scope of things, the tale hence does not indicate if the basic requirements placed on those with defective or ordinary *fiṭra* applies to those of exceptional *fiṭra.* However, just like the exact meaning of *fiṭra* or the specific conditions of its applicability, this question might not have mattered to Ibn Ṭufayl. As we saw, al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja also left this question of the status of religion in the life of the

Tūmart," *Studia Islamica* 66 (1987): 155). However, we ought to be careful not to conflate our images of Ibn Ṭufayl with Ḥayy. Reflected in his political appointment and medical profession, he was indeed not a hermit, as Conrad notes, but rather "an individual of many varied and sometimes conflicting interests and commitments, and one fully immersed in the vibrant but tempestuous social scene" of his place and time ("Introduction," 22).

[169] The terse reference to them living out their lives serving God (*ʿabadā*) is neither illuminating in this regard. The root has generally the meaning of worship, suggesting at the broadest level that the two were focused on their relation to God. But whether that worship necessarily took the shape of traditional religious worship seems questionable given the reference to a return to the life before Absāl's arrival, which as we know was purely meditative.

philosopher open. However, as we will see shortly, Ibn Ṭufayl's successor at the court, Ibn Rushd, would explicitly address this question left uncertain in the tale (and by previous *falāsifa*).

Be that as it may for now, the question of whether the revelation is in fact universal (and thus of benefit for the exceptional) does not affect what I see Ibn Ṭufayl's likely motivation in writing *Ḥayy*: a double containment of the subversive potential of a compatible but alternative, philosophical way to live. In this double containment Ibn Ṭufayl radicalizes some of the claims Ibn Bājja had made, thus tempering the potential for political reform that the latter had left somewhat implied. For one, Ḥayy's journey to the islanders lets him recognize that the claims of revealed religion are not merely true but necessary for the vast majority of people. Direct access to truth is not an alternative for most people. Second, Ibn Ṭufayl removes the exceptional (and even the next to exceptional companion, Absāl) from society fully. The weeds are not part of the city anymore. As a result, Ibn Ṭufayl undercuts the potential for political change. The exceptional philosopher has no political and social function. Whether in fact *universally* true or not, the tale leaves no doubt that it is best for all that revelation and its injunctions rule over most and that those who believe themselves to see beyond either do so in isolation.[170]

Fiṭra in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* thus points us towards significant claims regarding the place of revealed religion, the difference between the life of the masses and the exceptional sage, and the nature and role of religious and political leadership. The episode with the islanders at the end of the tale makes plain how the shared life of average humans creates the need for order, especially

[170] As many scholars have pointed out in recent years, Ibn Ṭufayl's critical stance towards society and its impact upon its members is in line with a long, originally Platonic question regarding the place of the philosopher in society. Thus, Nasri claims that "the point of Ibn Ṭufayl's tale is to show that the human soul can develop its powers independently of society. In a corrupt society, however, that development can be arrested and the soul settles for a comfortable accommodation (Salāmān). Or if the soul does so develop, it may be forced to flee society and to become 'one apart' (AbsāI)" ("The Mystic and Society according to Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufayl," 226). While "most men are caught up in a life whose aim is to satisfy their passion and desires" and as a result are "incapable of grasping the true end and purpose of their existence […], human nature, when free from the corrupting climate of a corrupt society, is capable of […] living according to values that are permanent and stable" (ibid., 227).

the organization of property. The author explicitly connects this claim to the kind of *fiṭra* of those who live in society, namely a deficient one. While the ultimate source of that deficiency or lack of development is not openly identified (meaning, do they live in society because their *fiṭra* is deficient or vice versa?), *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* states that most people simply are deficient in *fiṭra,* live in society, and are in need of guidance through revelation. The counter example of Ḥayy and his unique birth, growth, and lifestyle imply that alternatives are possible. And that those who are among the elite and are able to find and stay on the right path, better keep away from society. Yet whether that also implies that they are free from the revealed norms (whether purely religious or legal) that govern sociality is not clear. What is clear that while each of these groups has a different way of relation to the truth that is compatible with the other and equally salvific, the ending does state that the exceptional individuals might live best in isolation. Such separation in fact is good for the life of the sage as well for those for whom the messenger's direction is both necessary and sufficient.[171]

VI. Conclusion

While the political consequences of Ibn Ṭufayl's courtly tale are thus apparent, the exact meaning of the term, the relation between and source of excellent and deficient *fiṭar*, and the potentially universal claims of revelation are harder to pinpoint.[172] For one, the tale appears to suggest that besides the exceptional Ḥayy and the very devout or at least 'aspiring' islanders, there

[171] On the difficulty of later readers with the tale's ending see Idris's "Producing Islamic Philosophy," 392ff.

[172] I see support for my claim that Ibn Ṭufayl is responding to problematic claims regarding the social or political function of philosophy with his *Ḥayy* in the introductory and concluding remarks. Especially at the end, the narrator justifies divulging some of these secrets by noting the "great number of corrupted ideas that have sprouted up and are being openly spread by the self-styled philosophers of today, so widely that they have covered the land and caused universal damage" (ET in Goodman, 165). Some form of philosophical thought has brought wreckage and Ibn Ṭufayl (or the narrator at the very least) hopes to turn those he calls "the weak-minded" and which are ready to "throw over the authority of prophets to ape the ways of fools" (ibid.) back to the right path. Clearly, there is some controversy regarding the place of philosophy (that those not fit for it might be misled by it) that Ibn Ṭufayl is responding to.

is a third group of people who follow religion for no higher purpose or not at all. We can only make guesses regarding the status of their *fiṭra* is, given that that of the 'aspiring' islanders' is already *nāqiṣ.* Secondly, do society and isolation affect one's fiṭra? Put differently, do the weak live in society because they are weak, or do they become worse and worse through society? Finally, what room is there for *fiṭar* to change or even improve, especially considering the potential of the socially reared Absāl? What happens if the excellent live amongst the masses and would the masses benefit from isolation or are their *fiṭar,* like their destinies, simply set?[173] As the early commentators and the continuous relevance of the work in following centuries show, it has not lacked interpretations of what it represents. [174] As I argued, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* response to some of the challenges that the *fiṭra*-based, political and social arguments of thinkers such as al-Fārābī or Ibn Bājja might have posed. Yet while Ḥayy's failure as a revolutionary teacher and the admission of the crucial importance of revealed religion to the life of the masses contains denies the subversive potential of philosophical knowledge for the stability of the political and religious regime, it does not necessarily answer the theoretical concerns we raised when it comes to his use of the term *fiṭra.* [175] We must thus summarize the findings of this chapter and turn towards the tasks that lie ahead since they promise elucidation of some of the fundamental questions raised.

[173] As I mentioned above, when noting the inability of even this special group, Ḥayy apparently knows that even if "they were to venture beyond their present level to the vantage point of insight, what they had would be shattered;" rather than help, such a move would make them "waver and slip and their end would be all the worse" (ET in Goodman, 165). This suggest that, at this point at least, education or improvement is beyond the islanders. Yet, as before, it is not clear why this is the case: is it because of their *fitra,* or the harmful effects of society, or divine predestination (or maybe a combination of the three) that they cannot relate to the truth as Ḥayy (and seemingly Absāl) can?

[174] For an excellent account of the role of Ibn Ṭufayl's tale in the European Enlightenment see Ben-Zaken, *Reading Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and also Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Ṭufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

[175] The alternative to this would be to see Ibn Ṭufayl as opening up to his audience (and thus most likely the ruler), in a climate of brief political and religious tolerance, the esoteric and philosophical possibilities of humankind. Yet, I would argue, that if he wanted to do that there would have been no need to introduced human sociality in the very last part of the work. Had the author merely wanted to speak about the promises of philosophy, he could have ended the tale the moment Ḥayy reached the mystical heights he had desired.

Based on the use of the term in the text and the overall claims of the story with respect to Ḥayy, his life, and his encounter with the islanders, *fiṭra* appears to be primarily a sort of intellectual capacity to reason and access the truth given to an exceptional sage and not equally distributed among humans. By the power of his exceptional *fiṭra,* Ḥayy is called and able to follow a unique path of spiritual enlightenment separate from most other human beings. Over the course of this chapter, we have learned that at least in the context of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* this reading of *fiṭra* occupies a central position in the overall structure and purpose of the tale. It allowed Ibn Ṭufayl affirmed the importance of religious symbols for the majority of people to gain some glimpse of the truth. Yet while it is clear that the discovered and revealed paths are compatible, it is not clear if God prefers one to the other. While there is evidently room for religious worship of some sort in Ḥayy's (and also Absāl's) life, I cannot say whether Ibn Ṭufayl believes the messenger's mission universal, his demands good even for those who live in isolation and directly access the divine. The author does not say so explicitly. While the conceptual details of *fiṭra* in the tale are thus fuzzy, the political consequences of this use of *fiṭra* are all the more significant. It seems the primary aim of the account of the life of one characterized by an exceptional *fiṭra* is to affirm the necessity of the religious framework for the well-being of the people while undercutting philosophy's disruptive potential. Succinctly put, *fiṭra* in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* emerges in an intellectual context and appears to point to an unbridgeable gulf amongst humanity that is used to bolster the status of revelation as the source of direction in the lives of the majority. While emphasizing the compatibility of the established and revealed and the newly arrived philosophical path, Ibn Ṭufayl, with the help of the Qur'anic *fiṭra,* goes to great lengths to show that the possibility of the philosophical life is one for the very few. It is in fact a fringe phenomenon of little consequence to the political and religious status quo. Figures of the type of a

Ḥayy, potentially not even of this world, offer no alternative to the message of Islam in theory and certainly pose no challenge to its polity in practice. With this take *fiṭra,* Ibn Ṭufayl both inherited developed previous *falāsifa*'s take on and engagement with *fiṭra.* While agreeing with the broad vision of an intellectual and differing *fiṭra,* Ibn Ṭufayl has drawn different political conclusions. Rather than the center of political leadership or at least part of political change, Ibn Ṭufayl radicalized the isolation of the exceptional and thus reduced his political role to nothing.

However, as we will see not all agreed with Ibn Ṭufayl's conception of *fiṭra* or its political implications. As I have already shown in the previous chapter, Ibn al-Nafīs would write a counter tale that clearly sought to subvert Ibn Ṭufayl's vision of a sufficiency of *fiṭra* for exceptional human beings and its political implications. But even outside the field of tales Ibn Ṭufayl's quickly provoked a response. Already his successor at the court, Ibn Rushd, would respond to Ibn Ṭufayl's vision and offer his own conception of *fiṭra* and its role for both politics and other Islamic discourses. In particular, he turned to the question that would also occupy Ibn al-Nafīs, namely the impact that certain conceptions of *fiṭra* have for the role of revelation in the lives of both the exceptional and the masses. It is to his use and understanding of *fiṭra* that I turn next.

Chapter 6:
Shifting Emphases in the Conception and Use of *Fiṭra* in Ibn Rushd's (d. 1198) Thought

I. Introduction

This chapter shows how *fiṭra* aided discussions of a fundamental issue not explicitly tackled by previous thinkers: humanity's relation to the divinely revealed will (*shar'*). Turning to the works of Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), I argue first that a conception of *fiṭra* as a natural division of intellectual aptitude clarified his arguments regarding the proper approach to revelation: it is to be twofold, one appropriate for the elites and one for the masses. As a result, his understanding and use of the term shares much with his predecessors: it assumes and perpetuates a vision of humanity as divided by natural abilities and one that has implications for the shape of the ideal society as hierarchical. However, beyond this continuity with previous philosophical thought, Ibn Rushd's understanding and use of *fiṭra* also point to a transition. As we will see, Ibn Rushd not merely used the term in aid of a division of the elites from the masses, but also applies it to the question of universal human religiosity. *Fiṭra* in fact aids him in articulating his belief in a religious baseline available to all. For it is through their common *fiṭra* that humanity accesses basic theological insights. In contrast to what we saw in al-Fārābī, Ibn Bajja or Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd claims explicitly that all humans are able to access basic theological truths through their *fiṭra.*[1] Grounding all of humanity's relation to their maker, such a reading of *fiṭra* appears to connect with the more levelling thought of the scriptural interpreters as discussed in chapter 2. However, this is not to say that Ibn Rushd abandons hierarchies. He does posit both a *fiṭri* need for society that he shares with al-Fārābī, as well as the existence of general theological insights available to all. Yet he also firmly believes in a *fiṭri*

[1] As readers might recall, while al-Fārābī also used *fiṭra* to describe what humans share, he offered little detail regarding the content of that shared humanness. Instead, his interest rested with what divides the elites from the masses.

obligation to philosophize and lead society that only applies to some. As I will come to conclude, Ibn Rushd's complex understanding of *fiṭra* is both in continuation with many of the concerns of his predecessors, yet it also points to a development of philosophical and political discourse.

Known often as simply 'the commentator' or by his Latin name, Averroes, ʾAbū l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn ʾAḥmad Ibn Rushd was born in 1126 in the Andalusian city of Cordoba.[2] Heir to a prominent family of judges, he would himself become *qadi* of Cordoba as well as a celebrated jurist, philosopher, physician, and commentator on issues of interest to the Muslims of his time. The first few decades of his life were devoted to (legal) study in Cordoba.[3] Towards the end of his education the Almoravids had fallen to the Almoḥads.[4] According to his own description, Ibn Rushd was roughly 32 years old (1158) when he was introduced to the later Almoḥad ruler ʾAbū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (d. 1184). The latter was known for his keen intellect and philosophical interests and, according to the general scholarly narrative, he hired Ibn Rushd as the most promising candidate to comment extensively on the Aristotelian corpus.[5] However, Ibn Rushd only served in this role until he took up a juridical post in Sevilla (1169) and later Cordoba (1171). He returned to Sevilla in 1179 and was soon named *qadi* of Cordoba (1180). In 1182 he became physician to ʾAbū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf, who passed away after two years and was succeeded by his brother, ʾAbū

[2] We know about Ibn Rushd's life thanks to several historians of al-Andalus, such as Ibn al-Abbār (d. 1260; *al-Takmila li-kitāb al-ṣila*), Ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 1303; *al-Dhayl wa-l-takmila*), al-Dhahabī (d. 1348 or 1352-53; *Taʾrikh al-Islām*), Ibn Farḥūn (d. 1397; *al-Dībāj al-mudhhab fī maʿrifat aʿyān ʿulamāʾ al-madhhab*). Additionally, Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (d. 1270; *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*), as well as al-Marrakūshī (b. 1185; *Kitāb al-muʿjib fī talkhīṣ akhbār al-Maghrib*) have information about Ibn Rushd's life.

[3] As Frank Griffel notes, we know very little about Ibn Rushd's philosophical training (*Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung—Faṣl al-maqāl* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010), 74).

[4] On Ibn Rushd's thought as influenced by Almoḥad doctrines see, for example, Dominique Urvoy, "La pensee Almohade dans l'oeuvre d'Averroes," in *Multiple Averroes. Actes du Colloque International organize a l'occasion du 850e anniversaire de la naissance d'Averroes* (Paris 20-23 septembre 1976) (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), 47-53).

[5] At this point Ibn Rushd had already written on logic, which made him appear qualified for the task. Al-Marrakūshī's famous introduction of Ibn Rushd to the ruler by Ibn Ṭufayl might thus be more anecdotal. As Sarah Stroumsa has recently noted, this episode above all "credits the Almoḥads with the flowering of philosophy in this period," rather than clearly state that Ibn Rushd was "actively commissioned" by the ruler (*Andalus and Sefarad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 137; cf. also 141 on the propaganda of Almoḥad stewardship of philosophy). See also Griffel, *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 75f.

Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Yūsuf ibn ʿAbd al-Muʾmin al-Manṣūr (d. 1199). While Ibn Rushd and the new ruler had enjoyed a close relationship, Ibn Rushd—for reasons subject to speculation—was removed from his position as *qadi* and court physician in 1197 and banished to a place near Cordoba.[6] While he was reinstated after merely a year, Ibn Rushd died shortly after returning to the court in 1198 in Marrakech.

As Frank Griffel notes, much of Ibn Rushd's early works were part of a state-sponsored campaign to popularize Greek philosophy in the Maghreb that was supported by both ʾAbū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf and ʾAbū Yūsuf al-Manṣūr.[7] Ibn Rushd wrote first wrote his short introductory commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus around 1155.[8] Around 1164 he began working on his middle commentaries, both on the *Organon* and other works in the natural sciences. In 1177 he finished the middle commentaries with his middle commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics.* From 1183 he began his long commentaries, the sources of much of his later fame in Europe and beyond.[9] According to Griffel these works were no longer directly part of the state-sponsored program to rationalize and Aristotlelize the Almoḥads. Rather, they reflected the success of such a program, as well as Ibn Rushd's increasing efforts to move past predecessors such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Bājja and return to the Aristotelian text.[10]

[6] The exact reasons for this falling out are far from settled. As Charles Butterworth notes regarding the ruler's decision for banishment, "some claim that he wished to rebuke Averroes for an act of insolence, others that he was seeking to placate zealous partisans of religion within the court" (*Averroes: The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom and the Epistle Dedicatory* (Provo: Bingham Young University Press, 2001), xiv-v). See also Griffel, *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 83f.
[7] Cf. *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 80.
[8] I am following Griffel's dating here, who in turn follows Jamāl al-ʿAlawī (*al-Matn al-rushdī* (al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ: Dār Tūbqāl, 1986), 49-90).
[9] I devote a section to the commentaries below.
[10] Cf. *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 80f.

While Ibn Rushd is estimated to have written about 108 works in total,[11] a great part of the original Arabic of those is lost.[12] It is noteworthy that, as Anke von Kuegelken points out, different reception environments of Ibn Rushd's works had very different interests: while we find that far fewer of the original Arabic of the commentaries on Aristotle is preserved, the Latin world focused exactly on these commentaries at the expense of the more theological works.[13] In fact, Ibn Rushd's fame is largely due to his popularity and influence among medieval Jewish thinkers following Maimonides' high praise of him, as well as his importance as a reader of Aristotle for the scholastic

[11] Cf. Anke von Kuegelken, *Averroes und die Arabische Moderne* (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1994), 20. Von Kuegelken notes that probably a third of the works is lost and roughly 58 are extant in Arabic (though to varying degrees). While I am not going to further discuss the dating of his works (given how contentious the dating is), I do want to give a sense of the breadth of Ibn Rushd's corpus: besides his commentaries on Aristotle's logical works, Ibn Rushd wrote commentaries on works such as the *Physics, On the Heavens, On Generation and Corruption, Meterologica,* the *De Anima,* and the *Metaphysics,* as well as numerous shorter commentaries and summaries of several of Aristotle's treatises (such as the *Parts of Animals, Generation of Animals,* and *Parva Naturalia*) and two treatises related to his Aristotelian investigations (*On the Application of the Intellect and Intelligibles* and *On the Substance of the Celestial Sphere*). Additionally, he wrote his commentary on the *Republic,* a commentary on al-Ghazālī's *al-Mustaṣfa*, a book *On the Happiness of the Soul,* his famous legal work, the *Distinguished Jurist's Primer (Bidāyat al-mujtahid*), and a middle commentary on Galen's *On Fevers.* Finally, he composed his trilogy of works on religion and philosophy (which I will discuss below) and his famous refutation of al-Ghazālī (*Tahāfut al-tahāfut*).

[12] We possess the Arabic of the middle commentaries on the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric,* several of his short commentaries, as well as the exposition of fragments of Alexander of Aphrodisias on the *Metaphysics*. Several other works are extant in Judeo-Arabic (such as the medium commentaries on *De Generatione et Corruptione, De Meteoris, De Anima*, a paraphrase of the *Parva Naturalia*, and the commentaries on *De Caelo, De Generatione* and *De Meteoris*). Finally, some works have only come down to us in their Latin or Hebrew translation, such as his commentary on the *Republic.* While I am thus limited in my search for the use of *fiṭra* in his corpus, I have consulted several of the Hebrew works in an interest to trace the reception of the idea of *fiṭra* in Hebrew (maybe for another project), as well as widely read his corpus for the larger themes of this dissertation.

[13] Cf. *Averroes und die Arabische Moderne,* 2 and 8.

tradition of the Latin West.[14] This is not to say, as Orientalists have traditionally argued, that philosophy *per se* came to an end among Muslims (but flowered among Christians and Jews).[15]

Notwithstanding his contentious reception in Islamic thought and his tremendous impact on broader medieval philosophy, Ibn Rushd was above all a 'philosopher of Islam.'[16] As many interpreters and commentators through the years have not grown tired of affirming, Ibn Rushd was not a pseudo-orthodox pleaser of the masses who despised much of what he preached in private.[17] We have no reason to doubt that he was a committed Muslim. Rather, as Matteo Di Giovanni has noted, Ibn Rushd's main goal was to use Aristotelian philosophy to "address issues that were pressing in his own place and time."[18] What that meant specifically was to give a firm intellectual

[14] As Richard C. Taylor notes, "the works of Averroes were not widely influential in the history of Arabic philosophy, though they were appreciated by Moses Maimonides and some were known by Ibn Khaldūn. No school of Averroist thought arose in the Arabic tradition to continue his work, perhaps because of his failure to gain favor for his philosophically driven analysis of religious issues. But his works lived on in translations into Hebrew and Latin […]. The insights of Averroes and his detailed comments on Aristotle were initially welcomed in the Latin tradition. Yet with deeper critical study and growing familiarity with and reflection upon the texts and issues, it soon became apparent that the commentaries of Averroes contained philosophical arguments and teachings on issues such as the eternity of the world and the nature of the soul which were incompatible with Christian belief in creation ex nihilo and the personal immortality of the human soul" ("Averroes: Religious Dialectic and Aristotelian Philosophical Thought," *in The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, eds. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 196). However, he also points out that "since the emergence of interest in Averroes in the Arab world following the appearance of Renan's 1852 work, in some cases the writings and figure of Averroes have been used in blatant manipulation, with little if any regard to the genuine sense of his thought, to champion many diverse causes from socialism and Marxism to nationalism and more recently to promote the harmony of religion and rationality in the face of rising anti-rational Islamic fundamentalism" (ibid., 182). Ibn Rushd in the Arabic world was pushed to the forefront by Farah Anṭūn's (d. 1922) 1903 work, which called for new reasonable men; a call famously countered by Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and his advocacy of a reasonable Islam. For a study on the reception of Ibn Rushd in the Arabic world post Renan see von Kuegelken, *Averroes und die Arabische Moderne.*

[15] Instead, as Griffel notes, the particular kind of Aristotelian philosophy (*falsafa*) ended with Ibn Rushd; philosophy, however, continued in the form of *ḥikma* via thinkers such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and many others (*Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 61-70). While enthusiasm for Aristotle only began for Latin Europe and Jewish thinkers in Spain, France, and North Africa after the death of Ibn Rushd, Islamic thinkers had already turned away from Aristotle and his chief interpreter, Ibn Rushd, to the thought of one of his interpreters, Ibn Sīnā (cf. *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 98ff).

[16] Cf. Matteo di Giovanni, "Introduction," in *Interpreting Averroes,* eds. Peter Adamson and Matteo di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 2.

[17] Thus Roger Arnaldez writes: "One cannot separate the Muslim who applied the Law from the thinker who commented on Aristotle and believed in the truth of his thought" (*Averroes: A Rationalist in Islam* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 5).

[18] "Introduction," 2. In his own contribution to the volume, "Averroes, Philosopher in Islam," di Giovanni highlights two doctrines of Ibn Rushd's thought that particularly show how much context mattered to his philosophy: the uniqueness of intellect and the eternity of matter, both of which he sees as critical responses to Almoḥadism and the thought of al-Ghazālī.

and above all demonstrative foundation to Muslim life in al-Andalus. According to Peter Adamson, we should thus think of Ibn Rushd as "an Almoḥad thinker with a peculiarly 'Almoḥad' mission: to 'make one' the philosophical language spoken across all classical traditions of antiquity, Judaism, and Christianity, and of course Islam itself."[19] Thinking of Ibn Rushd in this way, we must also not forget that his times were not ones of trouble or severe persecution. As a result, we cannot in fact turn Ibn Rushd into a martyr of philosophy.[20] Put differently, Ibn Rushd was not an outcast philosopher combatting a hostile orthodox system.[21] Instead, Ibn Rushd was a successful and influential Muslim of his day who comfortably shared his holistic philosophical ideas and whose opinions were both well-funded and well-regarded.

That Ibn Rushd was comfortably a Muslim and a philosopher matters for the following inquiry. While other *falāsifa* had used *fiṭra,* Ibn Rushd's use and understanding are both noteworthy: first, he uses *fiṭra* particularly frequently in the context of those works addressed to fellow Muslims. Second, when he does so, his understanding appears to be both in continuation with previous *falāsifa* and slightly different. As we will see, he uses *fiṭra* to speak of a natural division of people by intellect, as well as a shared means of accessing basic theological insights for all. It is tempting to see a connection with Ibn Rushd the person, as well as the fact that on an important topic such as the existence of first principles, he sought to reinterpret the Aristotelian

[19] "Introduction," in *Interpreting Averroes*, 8.
[20] As Arnaldez puts it: "We cannot […] really accuse political power of having fought against philosophy in the name of religion. Averroes was not a martyr for freedom of thought; far from it, if he needed to concern himself with the relationship between faith and reason, he did so in a fairly relaxed atmosphere, with no need of hiding his philosophical convictions for fear of upsetting the representatives of a threatening religious orthodoxy" (*Averroes: A Rationalist in Islam,* 15). Arnaldez highlights this point of an integrated, peaceful life at the center of power again in the conclusion: "it would be historically inaccurate to believe that he was persecuted: in fact, he enjoyed the favor of caliphs, except for a short time toward the end of his life when he fell into disgrace" (ibid., 119).
[21] Indeed, as Richard Taylor has argued, Ibn Rushd's "rationalist approach to the issues of religion can be considered to coincide harmoniously with the rationalist elements of the theology of Ibn Tūmart," the central intellectual guide for the Almoḥads ("Averroes: Religious Dialectic and Aristotelian Philosophical Thought," 189). On the complex legacy of Ibn Rushd in his own time, which—as I mentioned above—did include a banishment but not a punishment, as well as a discussion of an episode in which he was driven away from the mosque in Cordoba, see Oliver Leaman, *Averroes and His Philosophy* (Oxford, Clarendon Press; 1988), 4.

corpus. While a clear causality is impossible to claim, two things are noteworthy: he is the only one among the *falāsifa* to have served in an official role in the Muslim community of his time.[22] More importantly, the works addressed to fellow Muslims do cite scripture and use *fiṭra* frequently and more theologically (despite remaining indebted to the hierarchical readings of previous *falāsifa*). Already al-Fārābī had used the term *fiṭra* to describe human nature more broadly, as well in order to differentiate different kinds of humans from each other; however, he did not focus on the religious use of that shared *fiṭra* (instead, for him shared philosophical and logical principles accessible through *fiṭra* or even contained in it took center stage). While there is thus precedent among the *falāsifa* regarding this double use, Ibn Rushd's specific conception of what it is that unites humans is new. Additionally, the absence of *fiṭra* in the logical works coincides with the fact that Ibn Rushd sought to discredit the idea that there are innate principles of logic that are not the result of induction (an idea both al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja had affirmed, as well as located in the *fiṭra*). We can thus speak of a double move that shifts the emphasis of using and understanding *fiṭra* from logic to theology, from a special science reserved for the few to a mode of inquiry open to the many. In this context of shifting emphases in his thought it is helpful to keep in mind that in his own life trajectory, Ibn Rushd the person too stands out among the cast of this dissertation.

II. *Fiṭra* in the Religious and Philosophical Works

In this section I will focus on the use and understanding of *fiṭra* in two of Ibn Rushd's works of explicitly religious concern and which he aimed primarily at his fellow Muslims.[23] These are:

[22] Others, including Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Ibn Ṭufayl, served rulers but only Ibn Rushd had a role as community leader.

[23] Incidentally, all three of these are available to us in the original Arabic and, unlike Ibn Rushd's commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus, attracted less interest by Latin readers (they were translated into Hebrew, however, and widely read).

the *Decisive Treatise (Faṣl al-maqāl*) and his *Exposition of the Methods of Proof Concerning the Beliefs of the Community* (*al-Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla fī ʿaqāʾid al-milla*).[24] I will also consider his refutation of al-Ghazālī's refutation of the *falāsifa,* entitled *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*). All of them reflect a time in Ibn Rushd's life when he was dealing with al-Ghazālī's thought in depth (roughly between the years 1179 and 1181).[25] As we will see in the following, Ibn Rushd's use of *fiṭra* in the *Faṣl* and the *Kashf* underlines the basic premise and argument of the texts: that people are of different *fiṭar* and thus suited for different kinds of discourses; as such this use is in line with other *falāsifa*.[26] At the same time we can also discern an increasing engagement with a more levelling as well as theologically relevant conception of the *fiṭra.* This is true for the *Faṣl* and the *Kashf* and especially so for his refutation of al-Ghazālī. In all three of these works *fiṭra* not only differentiates the few from the many but provides access to basic guidance about God that is available to all. Given this double emphasis on both, the *falāsifa's* differentiating and a more levelling conception of *fiṭra* familiar to us from the scriptural interpreters, [27] we can discern the beginnings of a shift. It appears as if Ibn Rushd began to bridge the two discourses, bringing together the two conceptions of *fiṭra*.

[24] A third work that belongs with these first two treatises (as it served as the introduction to the *Decisive Treatise*) is known as the *Epistle Dedicatory* (formerly, *Damīma*). It is dedicated to the question of God's knowledge of particulars and written in response to al-Ghazālī's call for a response by philosophers on this controversial issue. I will not consider it in the following as it neither makes use of *fiṭra* nor offers content relevant to my argument. For further details on the work see Butterworth, *Averroes: The Book of the Decisive Treatise*, xxxix-xlii; 38-42.

[25] Cf. Griffel, *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 101f.

[26] On this basic vision of the human being in Ibn Rushd see also Leaman, *Averroes and His Philosophy*, 187-188. According to Leaman's reading, Ibn Rushd not only divided people but thought that part of this division was the idea that only some (i.e. the philosophers) are humans in the fullest sense. On the modern engagement (or lack thereof) with Ibn Rushd's idea in the *Faṣl* that a gulf between the elites and the masses is basic to proper exegesis see von Kuegelken, *Averroes und die Arabische Moderne,* 354-55.

[27] However, as I will make clear, there is no religious *content* for Ibn Rushd. Rather, *fiṭra* allows all to access certain truths, rather than contain them (as some scriptural interpreters might argue, or as al-Fārābī at times seems to have suggested with respect to philosophical content).

The *Decisive Treatise* is written in a juridical vein and generally aims to appeal to a (juridical) Muslim audience.[28] Its goal is to argue for the equality of revelation and philosophy (though it does not use the term *falsafa*), in order to show that participating in "philosophy and logic […] is acceptable according to Islamic jurisprudence."[29] As Butterworth points out, the goal is not to establish a hierarchy between the two but rather to show that the connection between revelation and philosophy is "one of parity—that is, agreement on all levels."[30] Those who follow the injunctions of revelation are reasonable, while those who use their reason do not contradict revealed claims. However, not to take the excitement away, rather than merely say that revelation *allows* for the study of philosophy, Ibn Rushd actually argues that revelation "insists on its study."[31] Philosophy is a *farḍ kifāya* (collective duty on the whole Muslim community). The basic route to this conclusion is the following:

> Philosophy is the teleological analysis of the world, and […] as such it must involve attaining knowledge of the creator of the world. This is also, as it happens, the purpose of [revelation], which has the aim of regulating conduct by showing Muslims how that form of behavior connects with the way in which God has created the world and how he wants us to live. Averroes produces several Qur'ānic passages to establish the theological basis to enquiry into the organization and direction of natural things.[32]

[28] The full title of the work is *Faṣl al-maqāl fī mā bayna al-ḥikma wa al-sharīʿa min ʾittiṣāl* (*The Decisive Treatise Determining the Nature of the Connection between Religion and Philosophy*). By 'Muslim' I mean committed to and interested in the teachings of Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature. By 'juridical' is meant that it has the style of a *fatwa*, beginning by wondering if it is permitted, forbidden, commanded, recommended, or necessary to examine the law with a philosophical and logical eye or not. As Butterworth puts it, "his abundant recourse to Qurʾanic verses and to language highly evocative of the Muslim revelation indicates that he seeks to present this argument as something like a plea before a tribunal in which the divine Law of Islam is the sole authority" (*Averroes: The Book of the Decisive Treatise*, xx). In the following section I follow Butterworth's translation of the *faṣl* in *Averroes: The Book of the Decisive Treatise* (Provo: Bingham Young University Press, 2001) but amend it in one central aspect: where he translates *sharʿ* as 'the law,' I translate it as 'revelation'

[29] Leaman, *Averroes and His Philosophy,* 144.

[30] *Averroes: The Book of the Decisive Treatise,* xx.

[31] Leaman, *Averroes and His Philosophy,* 144.

[32] Ibid. As Leaman notes, given both the relatively shaky foundation in the Qur'anic text and the fact that philosophy is more than simple teleological inquiry, one has to wonder why Ibn Rushd decided to make this more forceful version of his claim (rather than argue for the mere permissibility of philosophy; cf. Ibid., 144-147). Many might find this not convincing in fact.

In short, we might say: God calls humans in his revelation to reasoning about the world and upon him; yet this is exactly what philosophy does.[33] As a result, philosophy fulfills the demands of revelation. Now this is not an absolute demand. Since it is a communal obligation, not all individuals have to fulfill it.[34] Those not interested in or incapable of such reasoning are much better off staying away from it. Rather, what Ibn Rushd in this work seeks is to give both permission and encouragement to those *who are able to go beyond*: those who *can,* should be allowed and ought to use the methods of demonstration—even if these methods are derived from something seemingly as 'un-Islamic' (in the eyes of some) as Greek philosophy.[35] All others, however, are better off not delving into such matters—though, admittedly, there is little harm if they do.[36]

The work is divided in two large parts, each again with a subpart: the first half is dedicated to what "the perspective of revelation-based reflection requires." Here Ibn Rushd first argues for "the obligation, according to the revealed will, to study philosophy and logic;" in a second step he then supports this argument "by showing that anything proved by demonstration necessarily accords with revelation."[37] The second half of the work gives attention to "the intention of revelation and the methods used in it for speaking to all the people," as well as an exposition of how "ignorance of these methods has caused factions to arise within Islam"[38]—something that

[33] In Ibn Rushd's own words at the beginning of the work: "Since […] revelation makes it obligatory to reflect upon existing things by means of the intellect, and to consider them; and consideration is nothing more than inferring and drawing out the unknown from the known; and this is syllogistic reasoning or by means of syllogistic reasoning, therefore, it is obligatory that we go about reflecting upon the existing things by means of intellectual syllogistic reasoning" (ET in Butterworth (2001), 2 (modified)).

[34] As Th. W. Juynboll notes in his entry on "farḍ" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam TWO*: " Islamic law distinguishes the individual duty (*farḍ ʿayn*), such as ritual prayer, fasting, etc., and the collective duty (*farḍ kifāya*), the fulfilment of which by a sufficient number of individuals excuses the other individuals from fulfilling it, such as funeral prayer, holy war, etc."

[35] Leaman notes that Ibn Rushd took his own 'liberal' recommendations to work in his juridical work, the *Bidāyat* (cf. *Averroes and His Philosophy,* 147f).

[36] As we will see below, Ibn Rushd does raise this question of what harm inappropriate science does to those not equipped for it in his disagreements with al-Ghazālī.

[37] ET in Butterworth (2001), xxf (modified). As many have noted, it is of course not necessary to say just because it is permitted by revelation to study philosophy, it should become an obligation. For some reason, Ibn Rushd here takes the stronger argument, claiming it is an obligation for some (rather than merely permissible for them to do so).

[38] ET in Butterworth (2001), xxf (modified).

according to Ibn Rushd's approach could have been avoided. As is clear from this set-up, while philosophizing is good and indeed obligatory for some, divulging what is unsuitable for the majority of people creates chaos.[39] Already we can see the affirmation of both what divides people and what they share. As we will see, Ibn Rushd's use of *fiṭra* aids both of these claims.

Thus, despite making a forceful claim regarding the obligation placed upon some to engage in philosophy, Ibn Rushd in the *Faṣl* does not call all people to philosophy. Instead, central to the argument of the whole work is the idea that different kinds of discourse are meant for different kinds of people—an argument we are quite familiar with at this point. And it is exactly in this context, when explaining who should abide by what or how to conceive of philosophizing as a communal obligation, that Ibn Rushd makes use of the term *fiṭra.* In line with previous thinkers, Ibn Rushd appeals to the diverging *fiṭar*, or different abilities for reason, of human beings as basis for the existence of multiple approaches to the good life. As mentioned above, in the first part of the treatise, Ibn Rushd seeks to show that philosophy is not merely permitted but rather obligatory as it fulfils the divine will as expressed in revelation. Thus he writes: "reasoning (*naẓar*) with respect to the books of the Ancients is obligatory (*wājib*) according to revelation (*bi-l-shar* ʿ), for their aim and intention in their books is the very intention to which revelation urges us."[40] Ibn Rushd has argued for the divinely-willed status of philosophy with the help of a scripturalist argument based in revelation. And given this overlap of intention, the one who prevents people *suited* to such reasoning in fact harms them. Now what is relevant for our interest is the description of those people suited and unsuited for such reasoning:

> And whoever forbids reasoning upon them [meaning the books of the ancients] by anyone suited to reason with them—namely, anyone who unites two qualities, the first being

[39] As Ibn Rushd explicitly notes, people venturing with interpretations beyond the apparent sense of revelation are a main source of such confusion and faction creation. For the majority of people God's revealed will is indeed perfect and sufficient. No other approach could convince more people (cf. ET in Butterworth (2001), 31f).
[40] ET in Butterworth (2001), 6 (modified).

> cleverness of *fiṭra* (*dhakāʾ al-fiṭra*) and the second legal probity (*al-ʿadāla al-sharʿiyya*) and moral virtue (*al-fadīla al-khalqiyya*)—surely bars people from the door through which revelation calls them to cognizance of God—namely the door of reasoning leading to true cognizance of him. That is extreme ignorance and estrangement from God (may he be exalted).[41]

There are people suited to reasoning, namely those of exceptional intelligence by *fiṭra*, training, and virtue. To prevent such people from their appropriate means of discovery is indeed harmful. A suitable *fiṭra* obligates its bearer for philosophy. As such, *fiṭra* here first of all separates the excellent from those less fortunate. This division, in turn, aids the natural division of humanity and grounds the idea of diverging discourses for different kinds of people.

The inverse claim supports this reading as we now hear about those not suited for reasoning (whose unsuitability however, according to Ibn Rushd, should not affect those who can reason):

> If someone goes astray in reasoning and stumbles—either due to a deficiency in his *fiṭra* (*naqṣ fiṭratihi*), poor ordering of his reasoning (*naẓar*), being overwhelmed by his passions, not finding a teacher to guide him to an understanding of what is in them [meaning the books of the ancients], or because of a combination of all or more than one of these reasons—it does not follow that they are to be forbidden to the one who is suited to reason about them.[42]

Fiṭra again is qualified—though this time with deficiency—and aids the division of people. Given this division the issues that some might have identified with philosophy are thus accidental and do not reflect the essence of the practice at hand. As Ibn Rushd seeks to clarify, just because one person can choke on water does not mean we should forbid thirsty people from drinking water.[43] People just need more virtuous formation or learn how to drink properly. The concern, in fact, is one of an important, indeed obligatory tool for some, in the hands of those suited for it. The use of *fiṭra* in this argument is then to bolster the idea that not all people are suited for the same kind of

[41] ET in Butterworth (2001), 6f (modified).
[42] ET in Butterworth (2001), 7 (modified).
[43] Cf. ET in Butterworth (2001), 7.

discourse. Distinguishing between those fit for philosophical reason from those who are not through the use of *fiṭra* thus connects Ibn Rushd's argument here to what we have seen so far in the work of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Ṭufayl. The term points to the different intellectual abilities of people with respect to rational discourse or demonstration. As such, it aids a division of humanity. However, we may note in the context here the heavy emphasis on teaching and preparation. At least from this passage it is not clear whether the 'deficiency' is not something that could theoretically be overcome.

In this context it is noteworthy that unlike his predecessors, Ibn Rushd does not think that a single individual can achieve much through *fiṭra* alone. The above quotation already alerts us to the importance of teachers or education. More importantly, Ibn Rushd points out that even the "naturally most intelligent of the people" cannot by themselves discover insights that took generations to develop.[44] Only revelation could do such a thing. This is all to bolster his broader claim that people at his time should be paying attention to the wisdom of previous generations, no matter what their origin. The disagreement with *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* is very clear; there are natural divisions among people but there is seemingly also a limit to the natural intelligence that sets some apart from the others. *Fiṭra* alone is insufficient. Instead, the discovery of foundational insights seems to be reserved for either a communal process or revelation.

Be that as it may, Ibn Rushd returns to the question of people's different suitability in accordance with their *fiṭar* when discussing the idea that there are different senses to God's revelation, meaning the external and the internal, which make for seeming contradictions between philosophy or demonstrative reasoning and revelation. The reason for these different senses is again people's differing suitability: "The reason an apparent and an inner sense (*al-ẓāhir wa al-bāṭin*) are

[44] ET in Butterworth (2001), 5 (modified).

set down in revelation is the difference in peoples' *fiṭar* and the variance in people's innate capacities (*qarāʾiḥhim*) for assent (*ṭasdiq*)."[45] Whenever a contradiction occurs, it is meant to alert 'those firmly grounded in knowledge' (Quran 3:7) to an interpretation that reconciles them. The people 'firmly grounded in knowledge,' those of excellent *fiṭra,* and the philosophers all appear to be broadly overlapping. What unites them is that their faith is grounded in *burhān* as Ibn Rushd's defense of the philosophers' faith makes clear.[46] Although philosophers seem at times to contradict a consensus that many believe to be unshakeable, this consensus exists only in practical matters. In theoretical matters only those engaging in demonstration can form firm opinions. Ibn Rushd thus rejects the idea that it is forbidden to argue with the existing consensus since this consensus is not grounded in demonstration.

At a later point Ibn Rushd again emphasizes the connection between one's *fiṭra* and different kinds of discourses when he explicates how there is help for those less suited to such demonstration via the other two methods, dialectic and rhetoric.

> Concerning the things that are known only by demonstration (*burhān*) due to their being hidden, God has been gracious to his servants for whom there is no path by means of demonstration—either due to their *fiṭar,* their habits or their lack of facilities for education—by coining for them likenesses and similarities of these [hidden things] and calling them to assent by means of those likenesses, since it is possible for assent to those likenesses to come about by means of the indications shared by all—I mean, the dialectical and the rhetorical. This is the reason revelation being divided into an apparent sense and an inner sense. For the apparent sense is those likenesses coined for those meanings, and the inner sense is those meanings that reveal themselves only to those adept in demonstration.[47]

The basic idea is thus clear: *fiṭra* is used in the context speaking about peoples' suitability for certain discourses and their ability or inability to interpret the apparent and pierce into the inner meanings of revelation. Again, despite the emphasis on division, we may note the parallelism between *fiṭra* and education. Nevertheless, the understanding of the term as an intellectual

[45] ET in Butterworth (2001), 10 (modified).
[46] Cf. ET in Butterworth (2001), 12f.
[47] ET in Butterworth (2001), 19 (modified).

suitability that divides people and its implications for who can interpret and handle the different senses of revelation appears clear.[48]

Ibn Rushd further underlines the connection between the highest form of discourse, or demonstration, and an excellent *fiṭra* when he takes up an explicit critique of al-Ghazālī. For him, the latter did not adhere to the tri-partite division of people and thus their different relationships to certain discourses. Instead, he wanted to increase the number of those adept in science. It seems that for Ibn Rushd this is a misguided goal. For he agrees with the basic assumption of other *falāsifa*: as their use of *fiṭra* reflects, people for them are born with differing capacities for excellence as well as limits for their development. While education matters, even for the more excellent, not all are born with the same potential. Instead, natural limits determine the kinds of discourses people can participate in. For Ibn Rushd this means that each group in society ought to read what is appropriate for them and, as a result, the leaders of Muslims ought to "ban demonstrative books from those not adept in them."[49] However, this argument with al-Ghazālī is also significant for the issue of the role of education alluded to above. For Ibn Rushd here concedes that

> the harm befalling people from demonstrative books is lighter, because for the most part only the people of excellent *fiṭra* (*ʾaḥl al-fiṭar al-fāʾiqa*) take up demonstrative books. And this sort

[48] As Ibn Rushd explains further, only those able to, have an obligation to interpret the apparent sense of the revelation. However, they are not to communicate this to those who can only relate via the apparent. Such discussions are to be restricted to demonstrative books that prevent those unable to participate in this kind of reasoning from being confused by their arguments (cf. ET in Butterworth (2001), 20f). This gestures to a certain esotericism, which I am not going to explore further at this point. While, as I will mention below, scholars have come to agree that Ibn Rushd does not hold a doctrine of double truth, it is clear that he does seem to believe that a fuller access to the truth exists only for the elites. And, as we have seen so far, his conception and use of *fiṭra* backs this division of people. While truth appears to be one, the philosophers access and share in it differently and, as Ibn Rushd frequently emphasizes, they are not to disseminate what will not benefit others.

[49] ET in Butterworth (2001), 22. Leaman in this context notes the connection to ethics: "It is clear that for Averroes there exists for certain texts a definite hidden meaning which the philosophers can get at, and which ordinary people do not need to reach in any case, since the apparent meaning will be sufficient to move them in appropriate directions. What makes the action *right* is its connection, ultimately, with its hidden meaning, and the rightness of the action does not presuppose knowledge of that connection by the community as a whole. This position is directly contrary to the most influential doctrine on the meaning of ethical terms in Islam, namely, that rightness or wrongness is definable completely in terms of conformity and disobedience to the commands of God" (*Averroes and His Philosophy,* 154).

> [of people] is misled only through a lack of practical virtue (*al-faḍīla al-ʿamaliyya*), reading in a disorderly manner, and turning to them without a teacher.[50]

There is here both an emphasis on the idea that some people are suited by *fiṭra* for certain discourses and, additionally, the number of these people cannot really be increased, which is exactly where al-Ghazālī went wrong. Here again, however, Ibn Rushd emphasizes the role of teachers, even for those of excellent and appropriate *fiṭra.* This section then affirms both the use of *fiṭra* to divide people and ascribe different discourses to them. At the same time, it is significant that such suitability is not sufficient. The role of community and teachers is important even for those most suited.

While the work overall defends philosophy and demonstration as legitimate Islamic means of inquiry for some, it is based on the broader idea that for each group in society there is an appropriate discourse.[51] As Arnaldez has put it:

> The Qur'an is revealed for all men and has fundamental appeal to the human faculties that exist in everyone, to sense perceptions and the imagination, in particular. Some revealed texts are in literal agreement with rational truths. However, men capable of reflection do not need Qur'anic revelation to know what falls into the category of demonstrative proofs. Islamic law, which speaks to all men, can be understood by different means. Those who live at the level of sensation and imagination are touched by the beauty of the style and by the brilliance of its images […]. Those who are capable of rational thought discover understandable relationships that undergird these images. It is, however, always the same truth that is apprehended through different channels. The double truth is not one of Averroes' teachings […]. The only distinction that should be recognized is that of a theoretical truth and of a practical truth […].[52]

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[50] ET in Butterworth (2001), 22 (modified).

[51] Thus, returning to his initial point, Ibn Rushd makes clear that leaders should not forbid demonstrative books per se because that way they would bar "from what the revelation calls to" (ET in Butterworth (2001), 22 (modified)). For him "it is a wrong to the best sort of people and to the best sort of existing things" to forbid demonstrative books (ibid.). As a result, the people who can study demonstration should be able to: "justice with respect to the best sort of existing thing is for them to be cognizant of them to their utmost degree by those prepared to be cognizant of them to their utmost degree, and these are the best sort of people" (ibid.). Ibn Rushd reiterates that point a little later on when he notes again that we should not offer insights to those not suited to them as it corrupts people and bars them from the benefits of revelation (cf. ET in Butterworth (2001), 27-28). In fact, the emergence of factions in Islam is due to the idea that corrupt interpretations and other inappropriate things should be shared with all.

[52] Arnaldez, *Averroes: A Rationalist in Islam,* 89.

As we saw, this division of suitability makes use of and relies on *fiṭra.* It is by *fiṭra* that humans are suited for certain discourses, though such a suitability is necessary but not sufficient. No man, not even the most gifted, is an intellectual island, able to flourish outside of society. It appears as if education and the influence of teachers matters a great deal. At the same time, Ibn Rushd's critique of al-Ghazālī makes clear that ignoring the division of discourses is wrong as well. So, while there seems to be suitability and education in interplay, there is also a limited amount of upward mobility when it comes to the division of people and the kinds of discourse they are able to handle.

Given this use and conception in the *Faṣl,* Ibn Rushd appears much in line with previous *falāsifa.* It should not surprise us hence that Ibn Rushd like others is also not consistent regarding a clear distinction of *fiṭra*—after all a natural kind of reason—from the root *ṭ-b-ʿ*. As I will argue in the next chapter, the lack of such a distinction might tell us more about our own assumptions in approaching this topic than about Ibn Rushd. Rather than care about our interests, Ibn Rushd sought to answer his own questions in his context when using *fiṭra* (alongside variants of the root *ṭ-b-ʿ*). For example, when discussing the idea of revelation calling people in different ways based on their nature (in the second part of the treatise) he does not use '*fiṭra.'* Instead, he resorts to the more common *'ṭabīʿa.'* Thus, we read in a vein familiar to us from al-Fārābī's division of discourses suitable for different kinds of people that revelation is in fact

> determined for every Muslim in accordance with the method of assent his temperament (*jibillatihi*) and nature (*ṭabīʿatihi*) require. That is because people's natures (*ṭibāʿ*) vary in excellence with respect to assent (*tasdiq*). Thus, some assent by means of demonstration (*burhān*); some assent by means of dialectical statements in the same way the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstration, there being nothing greater in their natures (*ṭibāʿhi*); and some assent by means of rhetorical statements, just as the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstrative statements.[53]

[53]ET in Butterworth (2001), 8.

Some are suited for demonstration (as well as the two lower discourses), others merely for dialectic and rhetoric, and a third group for rhetoric alone.[54] This division is anchored in their natures, which is, curiously, not referred to by the term '*fiṭra.*'[55]

Be that as it may for now, in the third part of the work Ibn Rushd reiterates that there are two broad ways of approaching revelation: forming a concept (*taṣawwu*r) and assent (*taṣdīq*). The latter occurs through three methods (demonstration, dialectic, rhetoric) and the former via two means (either by the thing itself or likeness). Ibn Rushd then notes that "not all people have natures (*ṭibāʿ*) such as to accept demonstrations or dialectical arguments, let alone demonstrative arguments, given the difficulty in teaching demonstrative arguments and the lengthy time needed by someone adept at learning them."[56] However, since revelation aims to teach all, it contains all three of these methods, serving both the many and those few suitable to demonstration. It is not clear to me why Ibn Rushd here does not use *fiṭra* and the same is true when he further describes the three kinds of people from the perspective of revelation: those suited to rhetoric, those by nature alone (*bil-ṭabʿ*) or by nature and custom (*bil-ṭabʿ wa al-ʿāda*) suited to dialectic; and finally those

[54] In this context Ibn Rushd makes his famous statement that 'truth does not contradict truth' (cf. ET in Butterworth (2001), 9), arguing that what some arrive at by demonstration does not conflict with revelation but rather represents one way the revelation speaks to a certain group of people.

[55] At this point it is worth noting that this division of means underlines what many have argued: that Ibn Rushd himself did not hold a doctrine of double truth. As Taylor notes, Ibn Rushd "does not assert that there are different truths for these diverse classes of human beings. Those for whom the rhetorical mode of argumentation is most fitting require the guidance of others if they are to assent to what happens to be the truth, since neither the premises nor the argument form as such contribute to the truth of the conclusion. Those for whom the dialectical mode of argumentation is most fitting are those who are misled particularly regarding the starting points and foundations of arguments; for them to hit upon the truth in their conclusions would require the guidance of others who in fact know the truth of the premises. There is then no doctrine of 'Double Truth' in Averroes such that religion has its truth and philosophy has yet another" ("Averroes: Religious Dialectic and Aristotelian Philosophical Thought," 185). The issue is rather one of appropriate methodology, not multiple truths. Leaman similarly notes that for Ibn Rushd "the conflict between philosophy and the Islamic sciences was not so much a conflict between different propositions as between different methodologies" (*Averroes and His Philosophy,* 7). See also pp. 167ff and 193ff on the 'double truth' as two descriptions of the same in ibid. On the question of the double truth see also ʿAbdelmajid el-Ghannouchi's article, "Distinction et relation des discours philosophique et religeux chez Ibn Rushd: *Faṣl al-maqāl* ou la double verité" (in *Averroes (1126-1198) oder der Triumph des Rationalismus,* ed. Raif G. Khoury (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002), 139-45).

[56] ET in Butterworth (2001), 24. As Frank Griffel has pointed out to me, it is also strange that Ibn Rushd uses the plural of nature (*ṭibāʿ*) here. The idea that there are multiple 'natures' does not seem to fit with Ibn Rushd's conception of 'nature' in his natural science works. This plural might in fact reflect the plural of the interchangeable *fiṭar.*

by nature and art (*bil-ṭabʿ wa al-ṣināʿa*) suited to demonstration.[57] The difference between *fiṭra* and *ṭabʿ* or *ṭabīʿa* is not clear to me here.

Despite such issues of distinction, it seems safe to say that *fiṭra* in the *Faṣl* aids the idea of differing human suitability for certain kinds of discourses. As a result, Ibn Rushd broadly divides the people according to their suitability. While such an argument is familiar to us at this point from our engagement with other *falāsifa* on these matters, Ibn Rushd's use and conception of *fiṭra* as differentiated is noteworthy for two reasons: first, he applies this general picture to his particular interests or arguments: in this case the question of philosophy and revelation. Second, the question of how sufficient an excellent *fiṭra* is strongly tips in the direction of the importance of education. While it is not clear whether people can *become* suited for the higher discourses, those suited for it also need guidance. Given this vision we can understand that, as Mokdad Mensia has noted, Ibn Rushd has been described as a literalist with regard to religion: "literal meanings are to be accepted unquestioningly by the many, while an elite may elucidate them through philosophical analysis, providing the ultimate semantics for religious language itself."[58] Some might say that on this reading, philosophy is a guide to religion, providing it with its foundation.[59] In either case, it is clear that there are different discourses suited for different people and, as a result, philosophy just as much as revelation is a legitimate and appropriate form of inquiry. *Fiṭra* appears to ground this argument (though, as we saw, not exclusively so): since there are different kinds of *fiṭar*, different kinds of discourse are appropriate, necessary, and indeed permissible.

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[57] Cf. ET in Butterworth (2001), 26. His famous statement at the end of the work regarding the connection between revelation and philosophy makes use of the root *ṭ-b-ʿ* as well, speaking of them as "companions by nature (*bil-ṭabʿ*)" (ET in Butterworth (2001), 32).

[58] Mokdad Mensia, "Dogmatics, Theology, and Philosophy in Averroes," in *Interpreting Averroes*, 43.

[59] Thus, Adamson writes: "Aristotelian philosophy provides the sole reliable intellectual foundation" ("Introduction," in *Interpreting Averroes,* 3); "philosophy is not just in agreement with religion, it is the indispensable guide to true religious belief" (ibid.). Similarly, Mensia notes that for Ibn Rushd, "philosophy provides the foundations for a sound understanding of religious doctrine, so that doctrinal formulations should be founded on philosophical truth" ("Dogmatics, Theology, and Philosophy in Averroes," in *Interpreting Averroes,* 27f).

The *Kashf ʿan manāhij*[60]'s use and conception of *fiṭra* continues some of the characteristics of the *Faṣl*. At the same time, this second of Ibn Rushd's religious works surprises with both its frequent use of the term and its more leveling and religious oriented reading thereof.[61] The work's explicit goal is to describe the religious demands placed on the Muslim masses, focusing on that which is readily available and obvious.[62] Put differently, the revelation God so graciously granted humanity seeks to guide all, and especially the masses, and does so in a way that does not demand interpretation; it is clear and immediate. In support of this argument, Ibn Rushd in this work makes frequent use of *fiṭra* as he goes through the central demands placed on the believer, from God's existence and unity to his attributes. And he does so while discrediting the arguments of four theological schools, Ash`arism, Mu`tazilism, traditionalists (*Ḥashwiyya*), and Sufis (*Bāṭṭiniyya*).[63] If the *Faṣl* showed that philosophy accords with religion, we now see how religion accords with philosophy.[64] While the work thus assumes a distinction between the masses and the few based on their different *fiṭar,* there is also a strong interest in the shared *fiṭra*, which allows all to access knowledge of God and thus aids the demands placed on the masses. [65] Given this interest in what unites humans and aids their basic theological education, it is not utterly surprising that Ibn

[60] Arabic references in the following are to the edition published as *Falsafat Ibn Rushd* (Beirut: Dār al-Arfāq al-Jadīda, 1978); when I do not translate myself, I refer to the English translation made by Muhammad Jamil-ur-Rehman, *The Philosophy and Theology of Averroes* (Baroda, 1921). Ibrahim Y. Najjar more recently also translated this work into English as *Faith and Reason in Islam: Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004). I should add that we still lack a comprehensive Arabic text of this work. As Griffel notes, Marc Geoffrey is currently preparing such a text (*Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 144147). I am aware of the textual difficulty and, relatedly, the difficulty of drawing conclusions from this work.

[61] While there is plenty of reference to the root *ṭ-b-ʿ* (either in the form of *ṭabʿ* or *ṭabīʿa* (see below for further discussion), the work dazzles with 10 uses of the stem *f-ṭ-r* (mostly as *fiṭra* but also several plural uses (*fiṭar*), as well as verbal ones).

[62] As Griffel notes, the work has two goals: to criticize Ash'arite theology and to offer Ibn Rushd's own opinion on central but controversial topics in theology (cf. *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 143).

[63] Cf. Mokdad Mensia, "Dogmatics, Theology, and Philosophy in Averroes," 29.

[64] Cf. ibid., 41.

[65] In the opening, Ibn Rushd summarizes his own arguments from the *Faṣl* when he says that: "The duty of the common people is to follow the exoteric law [revelation]; while the duty of learned men is to follow the esoteric one. So the duty of the common people is to follow the meanings of revelation in their literal sense, leaving aside every interpretation of it. The learned men are not permitted to expose their interpretations to the common people" (ET in Rehman, 84 (modified)).

Rushd—for the first time among the *falāsifa*—invokes both *sura* 30:30 and the famous *ḥadīth* by Abu Hurayra that claims that all are born upon the *fiṭra.*[66]

The conception of humanity as one divided by *fiṭra* in their suitability for different discourses (at this point well-known to us from previous philosophers) is obvious from the first use of the term in the first section of the work. When discussing the different inappropriate approaches to knowledge by the Ash'aris, Mu'tazilis, Sufis and so forth, Ibn Rushd notes that "not one of these methods is in accordance with the revealed method by which revelation calls all people in accordance with their different *fiṭar.*"[67] Similarly, at the end of the work Ibn Rushd raises the issue of those aspects of revelation that permit interpretation, as well as the question of whether this interpretation is allowed and for whom. He divides what can be found in revelation into five kinds. The second of those is divided into four again, with the second of those four being again divided into four kinds. The first of these four are "only illustrations such that they can only be known by the far-fetched and compound analogies, which cannot be understood, but after a long time and

[66] Ibn Rushd later cites the *ḥadīth* again when discussing the issue of predestination, reflecting the general consensus of scholarship on this matter. Contrasting it with the one that has God create some people for heaven and some for hell, he notes that the first claims that "the cause of disbelief is one's place of upbringing (*mansha'*) and the cause of belief is the disposition of the human being (*jibilla*)" (AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd,* 121 (my translation)). The second *ḥadīth*, speaking of double predestination, in contrast, sees disbelief as something God created for certain people. As a result of this seeming contradiction, there is a divide among Muslims regarding the question of the origin of evil and disbelief. In either case, this invocation of a scriptural source shows that Ibn Rushd was aware and in conversation with this tradition (on Ibn Rushd's view of predestination see Majid Fakhry, *Averroes (Ibn Rushd):His Life, Works, and Influence* (Oxford:Oneworld Publications, 2001), 101-105). Similarly, on the issue of God's justice and injustice, he explicitly denies the Ash`ari claim that God might sometimes do things he does not like. Rather, for Ibn Rushd, God did not make the people to err or be misled; rather, as *sura* 30:30, 7:172, and the *ḥadīth* of Abu Hurayra show, God is fully just (though that might also mean that some people are not destined for goodness, as he later concedes). That Ibn Rushd was familiar with the *ḥadīth* is also clear from his *Bidāyat al-mujtahid* (*The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*); in the section on who receives funeral prayers he notes: "the reason for their [meaning the jurists'] disagreement is the disagreement over [the status of] the children of the *mushrikun:* do they go to heaven or hell?" (my translation). He then notes that according to some, they follow the status of their parents but against that weighs the saying of the prophet "'everyone is born upon the fitra' which means that their status/ruling (*hukm*) is that of the believers (*al-mu'minūn*)" (*Bidāyat al-mujtahid* (Maktabat al-Kulliyat al-Ashariyya, 1922), 1: 242 (my translation)). For more details on Ibn Rushd's juridical method see Ziad Bou Akl, "Averroes on Juridical Reasoning," in *Interpreting Averroes,* 45-63.

[67] ET in Rehman, 120 (modified); AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 60. Though earlier, Ibn Rushd speaks of the common people's unsuitability for theological discourse by nature (*ṭibā'ihim;* cf. ET in Rehman, 94; AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 49).

much labor;"[68] and the only people that can accept them are those of "excellent *fiṭar* (*al-fiṭar al-fāʾiqa*)."[69] *Fiṭra* here describes differing intellectual abilities and the idea again is that of the division of people into those able to do the most difficult kind of reasoning. As Stroumsa puts it and as we have already seen from the *Faṣl*, Ibn Rushd's "pedagogical philosophy was grounded in a hierarchical view of human society," by which we are to understand that "each person [ought to be addressed] according to his or her capacity of understanding."[70]

However, returning to the opening of the work, already the second use of *fiṭra* branches out from the idea that the *fiṭra* determines what kinds of discourse are suitable for a person and thus divides the many from the few. Instead, the focus here is on the basic insights potentially accessible to all, particularly in a theological context. For it is the *fiṭra* of all, according to Ibn Rushd, that provides a foundation for an argument from creation. Explaining the better method of revelation, he argues that this method is based on two principles, one of them being the argument from creation.[71] This argument rests on two principles which can be discovered "by the power that is in the *fiṭar* of all men."[72] The idea is that fiṭra provides access to these principles through the shared 'power' of reason open to all. The first of these principles that apparently can be accessed through the ability for reasoning that characterizes the *fiṭra* of all men is that all things are created by somebody who gives life to them, as in the case of animals and plants. And the second is that all things created have a creator (*mukhtariʿ*): "for every created thing there is a creator."[73] Not only is

[68] ET in Rehman, 303.
[69] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 139 (my translation). As Ibn Rushd further clarifies, the things of this first kind are not to be interpreted and discussion of these matters is to be limited to the learned. As we have seen in other places, here at the end of the work Ibn Rushd again emphasizes that once the divisions of revelation and their focus on different kinds of people through different discourses is ignored, factions ensue (cf. ET in Rehman, 307f).
[70] *Andalus and Sefarad,* 143. She also points out how this hierarchical view was in tension with the "Almoḥad imposition of nonanthropomorphic theology on all classes of the population" (ibid).
[71] The other is the one from providence or care (*ʿināya*) (cf. AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd,* 60). The idea is that God created everything in the world for man's sake (cf. AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd,* 60f; ET in Rehman 120f).
[72] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd,* 61 (my translation).
[73] ET in Rehman, 122.

here an emphasis on an ability to reason that all humans share, but the particular application of that reason is shared is knowledge about God's existence.

However, this natural and rational basis for basic theological insights serves higher goals. The purpose of this argument from creation is to legitimize philosophy. For Ibn Rushd argues that

> it is necessary for one who wants to know God as He ought to be known to acquaint himself with the essence of things, so that he may get information about the creation of all things. For he who cannot understand the real substance and purpose of a thing cannot understand the minor meaning of its creation. It is to this that God refers in the following verse 'Or do they not contemplate the heaven and the earth, and the things which God has created?' [7:184] And so a man who would follow the purpose of philosophy in investigating the existence of things, that is, would try to know the cause which led to its creation […].[74]

The image here is one of a harmony, familiar to us from the *Faṣl,* as Ibn Rushd defends philosophy as the method that is in accordance with the creator's plans for humanity. Indeed, according to Ibn Rushd, many verses in the Qur'an invite people to acknowledge God's existence through the argument from creation. Summarizing his claims regarding this scriptural argument for a creator, he notes that "this method is the right path by which God called the people to a knowledge of his existence and alerted them about it by way of the awareness or consciousness (*ʾidrāk*) he placed in their *fiṭar.*"[75] According to Ibn Rushd, what this "first, implanted *fiṭra* in the natures (*ṭibāʿ*) of mankind"[76] means is made clear by a verse in the Qur'an, namely *sura* 7:172 (referring to the primordial covenant).[77] While thus clearly affirming a more levelling and theological reading of what *fiṭra* provides, the ultimate purpose is to back the idea that there is a scriptural obligation to philosophize, or explore God the inventor, even further. The use of *fiṭra* here legitimizes philosophy as it invokes the idea of a shared rationality that is implanted by God in human beings

[74] ET in Rehman, 123.
[75] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 62 (my translation).
[76] Ibid.
[77] Which reads "when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this.'"

and allows them to discover things about him. It is backed up by and rooted in the Qur'an and significantly shows both a close connection between the *fiṭra* and the nature of human beings (*ṭabʿ*), as well as their distinction. While *fiṭra* here is the source of human intelligence it is one that the creator himself placed in human nature before times in order to facilitate knowledge of him. Bringing together the scriptural image of the covenant or some form of primordial knowledge placed in humans and the specific content of that covenant,[78] we might thus speak of a sort of marriage of the theological and philosophical readings of *fiṭra.* Most importantly, *fiṭra* here is something clearly distinct as something placed by God into humans. However, I want to highlight while *fiṭra* here facilitates knowledge of God and thus takes a religious turn, it does not have religious content per se. Rather, *fiṭra* is a technique or form of reason available to all in theory.

What is important again is that this is a *farḍ kifāya*: the obligation to further explore does not apply to all. In fact, the work holds together both the claim that all humans can access basic theological insights through *fiṭra* and the claim that *for some* there is an obligation to explore these basic insights further. Hence, while affirming the existence of a basic rationality placed in all humans by God and theoretically useable to explore his existence and nature, Ibn Rushd also keeps the differentiated conception of humanity we had seen in the *Faṣl* and previous *falāsifa*. When further discussing the philosophical method as a legitimate way to fulfill man's inborn and shared basic rationality, he makes it very clear that certain methods of arriving at a knowledge of God are for some people, and others for others. What the *fiṭra* gives the masses is more basic. Unlike the learned, who can rationally approach these principles, the masses can only understand "what they can grasp by their senses."[79] While the learned seek to understand the real purpose behind the

[78] It is worth highlighting again that, as far as I can see, Ibn Rushd stands alone among the *falasifa* in making use of this image or idea of the covenant mentioned in the Qur'an.
[79] ET in Rehman, 129.

universe, the masses look at the universe and merely understand that it must have a maker. The difference is not substantial but one of details. Yet a difference it is, nonetheless.[80] Some are able to explore their interests in greater depth. *Fiṭra* thus has two roles here: one of describing commonality and one of describing distinction. While certain things are naturally in all, others are naturally different across people. Humanity by *fiṭra* both shares very basic capacities and is divided in its ability for higher, intellectual exploration of these basics.

This conception of humanity as sharing a basic ability for reason to be further explored by some also holds true in the second section of the work. Having argued for a knowledge of God's existence as available to humans in some form or the other, Ibn Rushd now turns to the question of God's oneness. According to Ibn Rushd, scripture also supports the claim that there is only one God. He refers to three verses in his support, *sura* 21:22, 23:93, and 17:44. But for our purposes, what is significant is that he claims that the meaning of the first ("If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins") is "implanted in the *fiṭar* by nature (*ṭabʿ*)."[81] By nature all humans are able to make basic logical claims, such as that there can be no gods beside God. Ibn Rushd believes that the claim that there could be more than one divinity is in conflict with our natural reasoning. *Fiṭra* thus once again acts as a source of very basic reasoning that is natural to all humans because it is implanted in our nature. However, as in the previous case there exists a difference in detail: "the difference between the learned and the masses is that the learned know more about the creation of the world, and the purpose of its different parts […] than the common people."[82] There is then both an affirmation of human shared qualities, at the level of basic reasoning (applied to the context of theology!) which is accessible through *fiṭra*;

[80] The implication again appears to be that not only are only some *able* to explore the divine in greater detail, they are indeed the ones for whom it is *permissible* or at least most appropriate to do so. There is no question that Ibn Rushd was not an egalitarian in the more common sense.
[81] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 65 (my translation).
[82] ET in Rehman, 134f.

and a clear differentiation of humanity along lines of intellectual capability. *Fiṭra* anchors both of these affirmations. Additionally, we should note that—as in the previous section—the idea that God's oneness is an insight accessed through *fiṭra* by nature makes clear that there is a difference between the two. *Fiṭra* is an ability to be open to certain arguments or a form of rationality, in humans by nature (*ṭabʿ*).

At the end of the third section, on divine attributes, Ibn Rushd reiterates this twofold idea, a basic reasoning possible for the masses and the engagement in further arguments attainable by the learned. Thus, we read that if one seeks to teach the masses about the attributes, one "should tell them as much as revelation orders […]—and that is only a confession of their existence without entering into details. For it is not possible for the common people to believe and understand them at all."[83] Details again are the dividing line since the common people are those, as Ibn Rushd clarifies, "unacquainted with the laws of reasoning;" or what we may call philosophers (though they may know theology).[84]

The fourth section of the work, on divine perfection, also makes use of scripture to support the idea that the masses can, just like in the previous cases of God's existence, oneness, and attributes, know his perfection. At the same time, it is very clear that this knowledge is limited; the length of details is not infinite and instead knowledge beyond basic, reasonable claims is restricted. Thus, one of the things "implanted in the *fiṭar* of all (*jamīʿ*)" is to think of a creator as wholly other: they have to be wholly unlike their creation. This, in turn, leads to the acknowledgment that the creator's qualities must be unlike those of the creation. As a result, most people know not to think of God as having defects or limitations; it is common knowledge not to think of the creator like that. However, this is where it stops. Indeed, revelation "warns us not to meddle with those things

[83] ET in Rehman, 156.
[84] ET in Rehman, 156 (modified).

which are far from the primary principles of knowledge, because it knows the small limits of human knowledge."[85] In support of these limits of people Ibn Rushd then invokes, among other passages, *sura* 30:30 and the idea that 'most people do not know.'[86] Hence it is important to "disclose[…] to the common people nothing which might lead them to a disbelief in the literal meanings."[87] *Fiṭra* thus continues to represent a basis for basic reasoning in the context of thinking about God, without resorting to further details. The engagement with details, as Ibn Rushd has repeatedly made clear, is for the learned only. While the masses are mainly meant to be led to proper actions, the learned alone are to be both furthered in knowledge and action.[88]

In a different form this idea that there is both a shared and a dividing quality to *fiṭra* comes up again when Ibn Rushd discusses the pitfalls of those he is engaging, primarily al-Ghazālī. The charge is attempting to divulge things to those not fit for it and mixing the works purely devoted to demonstration with attempts to make such knowledge known more broadly; thus bringing disorder to both philosophy and religion and confusing people.[89] As Ibn Rushd puts it: "it is necessary to bear in mind the limits which revelation has set about the instruction of every class of men, and not to mix them together."[90] Noting several absurdities when it comes to the conception of the senses, for example, he says that were it not for the respectability of those who uttered these

[85] ET in Rehman, 160. One of these limits, as Ibn Rushd explains, is anthropomorphism; something needed by the common people and a denial of which would have needlessly confused them (cf. ET in Rehman 162-167). As Ibn Rushd makes clear, denying anthropomorphism is not for the masses since it presupposes understanding of the soul, which in turn is not something revelation believes common people need to bother themselves with (cf. ibid., 168f and 173; see also 201f where Ibn Rushd again explains how for the common people it is impossible to imagine the existence of something that has no body, they are unable to go beyond their imagination). In fact, debating issues like this with the wrong people is one of the reasons for factions in Islam (cf. ibid., 170; see also 184-85 where Ibn Rushd likens the misuse of interpretation in the wrong hands to the practice of medicine gone wrong). We may note that Ibn Rushd further discusses the three kinds of people and their relation to doubts on pp. 180-182.
[86] Cf. AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 78.
[87] ET in Rehman, 167.
[88] Cf. ET in Rehman, 183f. He summarizes this somewhere else as: "Revelation should be taken literally; and the conformity of religion to philosophy should not be told to the common people. For by an exposition of it we should be exposing the results of philosophy to them, without their having intelligence enough to understand them" (ET in Rehman, 188f (modified)).
[89] Cf. ET in Rehman, 190f.
[90] ET in Rehman, 204 (modified).

absurdities, these ideas would not have convinced "anybody with a healthy *fiṭra.*"[91] The idea here is again one of common and very basic reason.[92] Similarly, when engaging the question of how revelation can best serve complicated truths to the masses, such as the creation of the universe, Ibn Rushd takes issue with the Ash'ari approach of seeking to disclose difficult content to people not prepared to take it.

For Ibn Rushd, the easiest and best way to make people in general understand that the universe is created[93] is to connect the claim to two principles: that the universe exists for the benefit of creation; and that a thing ordered towards a single purpose is created.[94] As in the case with God's existence, the idea is that such basic insights are reasonable to humans and thus most immediate and most suited to the majority of men. However, unlike Ibn Rushd, Ash'aris do not deem the argument from creation appropriate for people, seeking to deny too close connections between causes and effects and rather stressing the possibility of all creation.[95] God is under no necessity, he could have created otherwise. Connecting the basic theological insights of suitability and purpose described above, Ibn Rushd argues that such thinking (i.e. the Ash'ari focus on divine freedom), is "against what is in the *fiṭar* of the people."[96] The idea, familiar to us from the previous support for the argument from creation, is that "the one who denies the existence of effects as a result of causes with respect to the question of creation, or whose intelligence cannot conceive it, has no knowledge of creation and of the creator."[97] Here again we see the sense of a natural

[91] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*,94 (my translation).
[92] Though, I should add that the issue of health has been not only of interest to al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja but also concerned Ibn Rushd in his more explicitly political works (see my discussion of death as preferred for those suffering from incurable ailments below).
[93] Ibn Rushd describes the different scriptural sources that affirm the suitability of the universe for creation on pp. 211-217.
[94] Cf. ET in Rehman, 210.
[95] Cf. ET in Rehman, 217-219.
[96] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 102 (my translation).
[97] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 102 (my translation).

disposition to reason that is, in this work, conceived in the context of basic theological insights (i.e. that there is a maker and that maker is one). However, since this is a basic disposition for reasoning, it can be more fully developed or less and thus divides people by natural suitability.[98]

Finally, it remains to address the parallelism of the roots *f-ṭ-r* and *ṭ-b-ʿ* in the *Kashf.* As we saw above, Ibn Rushd seems to view the former as a subcategory of the latter. Human nature is rationality and the different human *fiṭar* are subcategories of this nature. Generally speaking, there is a standard use of *ṭabīʿa* as simply 'nature' (or natural) in several instances[99] that seems to be easier to hold separate from the idea of *fiṭra.* Additionally, we observed that when discussing God's oneness, Ibn Rushd had argued that access to such knowledge is provided by both revelation and 'in the *fiṭra* by *ṭabʿ*.'[100] The *fiṭra,* or what God planted in humans, is the reason that certain things appear natural to humanity. *Fiṭra* is the source of the particular nature of mankind (namely, rationality) and can thus be seen as a shorthand for nature (thus, when Ibn Rushd summarizes that same argument a page over, he speaks of it as the argument "by *ṭabʿ* and revelation."[101]). Human nature is larger by implication; it at once can be differentiated from the *fiṭra* and contains it. It is then not surprising to also see that *ṭabʿ* too is used in the context of theological issues in this work. Thus, when discussing the question of the creation of the universe, Ibn Rushd argues that when looking around the world and noticing its design, human beings will know that it is created. Such an argument is based on two principles: that the universe serves the interests of man and other beings; and that what has such an ordered, single goal is created. These two principles lead us "by

[98] A similar use occurs when Ibn Rushd discusses the nature of prophethood. Prophethood, he argues, is based on two principles: that its existence is well-known and that the one who lays down laws by revelation is a prophet (cf. ET in Rehman, 247). The first principle all people (save some exceptions) agree on and the second principle "also has no doubt in it with respect to the human *fiṭar*" (AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 114 (my translation)). The sense here too is one of basic, shared human agreement with respect to a basic theological idea.
[99] For example, AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 53, 57, 63, 67, 70, 82, 105, 106, 110, 130, 132; even with reference to human nature (see esp. 111 and 130).
[100] Cf. AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 65.
[101] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 66 (my translation).

ṭab ʿ" to see that the universe is created.[102] As this example shows, 'nature' broadly conceived here means rationality. *Fiṭra* is a sub-category of that rationality. Similarly, Ibn Rushd later speaks of the fact that order helps us understand that there is a creator and this order is of two kinds: "that which God has placed in the *ṭibāʿ* and souls (*nufūs*)"[103] and that which surrounds the universe, that is the movement of the heavenly bodies. Without the heavenly bodies there would be no life, and without the faculties God placed in all, there would be no life either. Thus, things are like this because of the *ṭibāʿ* of the heavenly bodies and the *ṭibāʿ* of all creatures affected by them. *Ṭabʿ* again then roots an argument from design or order, though it is in a sense close to the idea of a simple nature made in accordance with God's plan.

When engaging the question of divine justice and arguing with the Ash'ari take thereof, Ibn Rushd invokes Qur'an 30:30 and the *ḥadīth* of Abu Hurayra on the question of whether God created some to err and others to remain steadfast or created all to not err. The seeming tension he resolves by arguing that first of all, all things are in accord with God's will and this means that some people are indeed created with a disposition to err and they thus come to it by their *ṭibāʿ* as well as external causes. Given, however, that the "disposition (*khilqa*) of the *ṭibāʿ* differs on these matters,"[104] this basic fact leads some astray and confuses them. Thus people of "wicked *ṭibāʿ*"[105] will be misled by the Qur'an's assertion of double predestination, just as "for the sick bodies good drugs are injurious."[106] And while some might object that it is unjust for God to create people doomed for error, Ibn Rushd believes the opposite is true. This is due to the fact that "the nature (*ṭabīʿa*) from which he created the human being and the structure or constitution (*tarkīb*) upon which he constructed (*rakiba*) the human being demanded that some, very few people would be wicked by

[102] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 99.
[103] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 125 (my translation).
[104] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 130 (my translation).
[105] Ibid.
[106] ET in Rehman, 283.

their *ṭibāʿ*."[107] The sense here is less scientific (meaning, demonstrative) and rather one of a natural, divinely given ability to not err, which in this context means to remain a believer and not leave the righteous path. *Fiṭra* is the rational access to certain theological insight that has been placed in the nature (*ṭabʿ*) of humanity. As a result, *ṭabʿ* can be used as a shorthand, explaining a somewhat interchangeable use of the two roots.

The fact that *ṭabʿ* contains *fiṭra* (which can be used to access theological insight) and yet is larger than it is underlined by the fact that Ibn Rushd prefers to use *ṭabʿ* beyond the question of accessing theological matters. This is true particularly in the context of logic. Thus, when Ibn Rushd denies Ash'ari arguments he speaks of their arguments as inappropriate by both revelation and *ṭabʿ*. Interestingly, their arguments are inappropriate by revelation because the common people cannot understand them and by *ṭabʿ* because they are not scientific or rational (*burhānan*), emphasizing the connection between *ṭabʿ* and demonstrative knowledge/ rationality. Similarly, on the issue of divine attributes he disagrees with the method of the *mutakallimun* for their's is not a scientific (*burhāniyya*) approach; and even if it had been, it would not have been "in the *ṭibāʿ* of the majority of the common people."[108] Also, on the divine attributes, when discussing the question of divine vision, he speaks of those "first principles [that are] by *ṭabʿ* available to all" and basic to sciences such as mathematics and philosophy.[109] This connection between the first principles and human nature is in line with what we have seen in al-Fārābī.[110] However, while al-Fārābī often used *fiṭra* to speak of the natural origin of these principles, Ibn Rushd seems to distinguish between

[107] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 130f (my translation).
[108] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 80 (my translation).
[109] AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 92 (my translation). A little on in the same argument, he also notes that the idea of the *mutakallimun* that it is possible to hear colors and see sounds is "a departure from the *ṭabʿ*" (AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 93 (my translation)), implying a sense of naturalness.
[110] Also in his defense of causes, at the end of the section on providence, Ibn Rushd says that to deny the effects of causes (which denies the basis of philosophy and the sciences), is "very foreign to the *ṭibāʿ* of the people" (AR in *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 128 (my translation)), affirming the connection between basic, shared principles and *ṭabʿ* once again.

the two: he uses *fiṭra* in the *Kashf* to speak about the human ability to access knowledge of God and *ṭabʿ* to speak of human nature in the context of logic and more generally. As we will see shortly, the impression that Ibn Rushd substituted *ṭabʿ* for *fiṭra* in the context of strict science (or the basis of demonstration), which we also saw to some degree in the *Faṣl,* holds also true for his commentaries on Aristotle's logical corpus. I am tempted to say that *fiṭra* has been emptied of logical content and been made narrower. While the broader *ṭabʿ* still contains the idea that certain rational principles reside in human nature, *fiṭra* is associated more with the theological application of these principles (and the idea that certain such knowledge can be accessed by all, while the details are to be worked out by some).[111]

In summary, the *Kashf* then offers a trend towards a more shared—and thus also more levelling—,as well as theological use of *fiṭra.* At times, however, *fiṭra* is still invoked in the context of different human abilities and thus differentiation. In either case, in this work *fiṭra* is distinct from a broader *ṭabʿ* that contains the former and can be used as a shorthand. Finally, it appears as if *fiṭra's* former function as the basis of demonstrative principles has been taken over by the broader term *ṭabʿ*. While I will turn to the issue of an absence of *fiṭra* in the logical works next, it remains to be summarized that in both of the religious works discussed here, *fiṭra* plays a double role: as divider of the people by intelligence, and as a shared ground for accessing theological insights thus available to all.[112] Put differently, there appear to be two possible relations between a broader 'nature' and *fiṭra:* first, *fiṭra* is implanted in a broader nature and describes our *unequal* capacity

[111] Though we may note that both roots are associated with a degree of variability.

[112] See Leaman on the insight that, while philosophy and religion are equal for Ibn Rushd, "there are things which the prophet can do which are unattainable by the philosopher," namely teach the masses and lay down a law (*Averroes and His Philosophy,* 129). "What the prophet has is *practical* knowledge in addition to the theoretical knowledge which he shares with the philosopher, so that the content of the prophetic law (*sharīʿa*) is not different from the content of philosophical law (*nomos/ nāmūs*). The prophet is far better at putting this content over to his community and succeeds in transforming abstract ideas about human happiness into political directives and social informs which then regulate the life of the community" (ibid., 129f). Neither religion nor philosophy is thus better than the other, one is just more practical.

for reason and thus what differentiates people; second, *fiṭra* describes a particular kind of reason that all people have and that is applied to God.[113]

The third work to consider in the series of Ibn Rushd's religious and philosophical works is the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut,* or his refutation of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut.*[114] In the work Ibn Rushd tries to address al-Ghazālī's critique of philosophy,[115] hoping to recover the worth of good Aristotelianism and use of demonstrative proof over against the dialectic of theologians. For our interest, there are three uses of *fiṭra* in the work, which present it broadly as a source of knowledge—though neither particularly in relation to logic nor theology.[116]

In the first discussion, on the eternity of the world, Ibn Rushd wants to carefully distinguish what might be generally known or accepted and what is certainly true and demonstrably proven. In this context of one disputing what appears evidently and universally true to another, we read that "if two people dispute about a sentence and one says that it is poetry, and the other that it is prose,"[117] judgment rests with "the sound (*sālima*) *fiṭra*"[118] that can recognize poetry. Since the context in which the example of *fiṭra* is invoked as a means of arbitration or rational judgment is one of drawing a contrast between mere opinions and what can be proven by logic, it seems that *fiṭra* is compared on the ability to be a source of arbitration. It is an ability to make certain

[113] All credit to Toni Alimi for helping me formulate these two uses.
[114] References in the following section are to the Arabic edition *Tahāfot al-tahāfot*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1930). The standard translation, which I cite whenever used, is by Simon van den Bergh, *Averroes'* Tahafut al-tahafut (Cambridge: EJW Gibb Memorial Trust, 1954 (2 volumes)).
[115] Chiefly the charge that the philosophers are unable to prove their central theses such as the eternity of the world (cf. Griffel, *Ibn Rushd, Maßgebliche Abhandlung,* 143).
[116] Al-Ghazālī, in the first discussion of the section on natural sciences, speaks of "the secrets of God most high in disposition (*khilqa*) and *fiṭra"* and the limitlessness of God's abilities (AR in Bouyges, 535) but this is neither Ibn Rushd's use nor of relevance to this discussion I believe.
[117] ET in van den Bergh, 1: 8.
[118] AR in Bouyges, 16 (my translation).

judgments, namely rational ones. However, it is not explicitly named as the source of such judgments in logical matters.

The next use of *fiṭra* makes a very similar assertion, invoking *fiṭra* as the source of rational judgments, comparable to a logical judgment that is argued for. Thus, in the same section a little further on, Ibn Rushd is still debating the question of a disagreement between the philosophers and the theologians regarding what counts as possible/impossible and necessary/unnecessary. While al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd argues, claims that there is no criterion for judging between different claims regarding what counts as a logical necessity or not, he begs to differ. What the philosophers claim is "known by necessity (*maʿlūm bi-l-ḍarūra*),"[119] while the theologians' claims regarding something as necessarily absurd is not possible.[120] Theirs are sophistical or rhetorical, not demonstrative arguments, whereas the theologians are operating more on matters of taste: "just as, when one man claims that a line is rhythmical and another denies it, the criterion is the immediate judgment/taste (*dhauq*) of the sound [and] excellent *fiṭra* (*al-fiṭra al-sālima al-fāʾiqa*)."[121] The repeated context of logical judgments and the use of familiar adjectives such as 'sound' or 'excellent' are reminiscent of previous *falāsifa's* use of the term. However, neither here nor in the above example is *fiṭra* explicitly the source of the first principles or the basis for logic. Rather, the term is invoked in a comparison that discredits *fiṭra*: it is more like the 'taste' one might have in poetry, rather than a serious demonstrative argument.[122] The sense of (an albeit very) basic rationality appears still true.

[119] AR in Bouyges, 26 (my translation).
[120] As van den Bergh notes, the issue at stake here is that "assertions whose contrary is equally false are those in which the predicate does not apply to the subject (*Top. B* 8.114a4), the colourless is neither black nor white. Ghazali's assertion that there may be a proof of the opposite of a necessary truth can neither be proved nor refuted, since, being in opposition to the principle of contradiction, it annuls the idea of proof" (*Averroes'* Tahafut al-tahafut, 2: 7).
[121] ET in van den Bergh, 1: 14 (modified); AR in Bouyges, 26.
[122] Van den Bergh notes the Sufi implications of the term *dhauq* (cf. *Averroes'* Tahafut al-tahafut 2: 11).

In the third proof of the first discussion, on the topic of the human soul, Ibn Rushd describes those fit to engage the thoughts of the philosophers and their particular method. He notes that "he alone can grasp their theories in these matters who has read their books and fulfilled the conditions there laid down by them, and has besides an exceptional (*fāʾiqa*) *fiṭra* and a knowledgeable teacher."[123] Here the sense is close to what we saw in the *Faṣl* and parts of the *Kashf*: distinguishing people by their qualification or talent for philosophy. At the same time, the emphasis on teacher again makes clear that alone, *fiṭra* does not seem to be enough—something we already saw in the *Faṣl* and the *Kashf*. A sufficiency of *fiṭra* and thus a Ḥayy-like figure appears impossible for Ibn Rushd.[124]

In summary we can say that *fiṭra* in the *Tahāfut* certainly connects Ibn Rushd to his predecessors. *Fiṭra* is a form of rationality and ground for argument, to be used in arbitration; it is variable and distinguishes those fit or destined for philosophy. However, as in previous works, there is an emphasis on education; at the same time, *fiṭra* is not *explicitly* connected to logic or the first principles. As in the previous two works, there is thus both a sense of continuation and shifting—though in this case less to the theological. This does not surprise since the *Tahāfut* serves a different purpose than the *Faṣl* and the *Kashf.*

Moreover, we saw that the religious and philosophical works share some broad strokes in their use of *fiṭra.* They balance a levelling and a differentiated reading and thus the idea that while there is a basic rationality (applicable to theological questions in this case) available to all, people are naturally divided by their suitability for certain discourses. At the same time, a more technical use of *fiṭra* as a source of logical principles is missing. In his refutation of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd appears closest to his predecessors as he invokes the excellent *fiṭra* in the context of arbitration,

[123] ET in van den Bergh (modified), 1: 63; AR in Bouyges, 108.
[124] This seems also true since for Ibn Ṭufayl *fiṭra* appeared to contain more inspirational elements.

distinction, and philosophy. However, even here a more technical use is missing. Rather than interested in the principles of logic, Ibn Rushd repeatedly stresses the need *of all,* no matter how excellent, for teachers. Thus, despite the clear emphasis that some are able to penetrate the workings of the universe to a higher degree than others, there is a more pronounced concern with what God's way of creation might offer to all in their search for knowledge of their maker.[125]

III. Implications

Given the balance between a division of people by *fiṭra* and an emerging interest in humanity's shared theological insights, it is worth examining the political implications of such a conception of the human being. Here it is generally important to note that Ibn Rushd on politics sides with Fārābī rather than the much more 'contemporary' Ibn Ṭufayl or Ibn Bājja. Solitude is no means to perfection, even for the most talented. Instead, all need guidance.[126] As a result, society for Ibn Rushd is essential to human well-being, disagreeing with the two central claims of

[125] One possibility to consider for the entire dissertation is that *fiṭra* appears to work like a dual character concept for the *falāsifa* and maybe even beyond. While, throughout the dissertation we have seen that al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Ṭufayl all differ in their concerns and uses with respect to the idea of the *fiṭra,* something appears true for all of them. While all humans have a *fiṭra* (and maybe even all creatures), there is a second, qualitative way in which the concepts contain an evaluative aspect. Being both a general description and referring to a normative dimension is exactly what dual character concepts do. As Kevin Reuter notes, "dual character concepts are unique in that their descriptive and normative dimensions are related but independent. To illustrate their properties, take the example of the concept artist. On the one hand, we consider a person to be an artist if certain descriptive aspects, such as painting pictures for a living, are met. On the other hand, we may also conceive of a person as an artist if she satisfies norms that spell out what we believe an artist should be or should do, for instance, be committed to creating works of deep aesthetic value. Consequently, people can categorize a person as an artist, if she fulfills the descriptive, or the normative criterion, or both" ("Dual Character Concepts," *Philosophy Compass* 14 vol. 1 (2019): 1). However, I am not sure that is really the case. To me it seems *fiṭra* describes both the general reality of how humans are created and a subset of people particularly good at being created. It appears to be rather what Sarah-Jane Leslie calls a case of "standard-raising" or "an intensification of the normal criteria" for who counts as having a *fiṭra* ("'Hillary Clinton is the Only Real Man in the White House': Dual Character Concepts, Generics, and Gender," *Analytic Philosophy* 56, vol. 2 (2015): 115).

[126] See also Erwin Rosenthal on this point: "While he is convinced that man can reach his highest perfection only in the ideal state, he insists that no man can live, let alone reach happiness and perfection, outside any kind of political association" (*Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 175f). Di Giovanni has noted that such a view not only disagreed with Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl but above all was taken to practice by Ibn Rushd in his own engagement in social and political life through his various offices and functions (cf. "Averroes, Philosopher in Islam," 9f).

his Andalusian predecessors (i.e. a solitary philosopher, able to reach the heights of reason by himself). However, all need society because they need others to fulfill what they lack or benefit from their strength. Humans are indeed of differing abilities, with some more capable than others. The result of this claim, familiar previously from the idea of people's suitability for different discourses, at the political level is a society divided by groups and—ultimately—ordered in levels. In line with his conception of the human as balancing both what is shared and what is open only to a few, Ibn Rushd's vision of society thus brings together the need for all to live in society in order to flourish and the hierarchical structure of such a society ordered by ability.

First of all, we might recall that, in line with the passing mention of a teacher in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut,* Ibn Rushd in the opening of the *Faṣl* emphasized the importance of training and also explicitly denies the idea of solitary philosopher such as Ḥayy. As I mentioned above, he argues that one person alone, and purely by their nature, could not reach the heights of insight:[127] "There is not an art among them that a single person can bring about on his own."[128] In fact, both the scientific and practical arts are a communal process and one that develops over time. Human perfection for Ibn Rushd is social. Individuals, no matter how talented, cannot become proficient in any art without other human beings and, relatedly, without guidance and education.

[127] Cf. ET in Butterworth (2011), 5; although there is no use of *fiṭra* here.
[128] ET in Butterworth (2011), 6.

Similarly, in his comments on Ibn Bājja's *Epistle of Conjunction*,[129] Ibn Rushd explicitly denies that humans can attain perfection of metaphysical knowledge in isolation.[130] He most clearly writes in section 16 that it is indeed not through "the regime of the solitary" that felicity can be achieved.[131] Rather, political science has shown that man is "part of society."[132] The inverse is in fact true, "all that exists in that society is an aid for its attainment because that society existed to aid in the attainment of this felicity."[133] And while, as Plato allows, philosophers might later in life be relieved from their duty to govern and retire to full existence in contemplation,[134] such retirement is not possible before they have fulfilled their obligation to govern: a "forsaking of mankind is impossible."[135] As Ibn Rushd himself notes at the end of section 16, he has offered

[129] This late work (probably from around 1190) by Ibn Rushd is accessible only in an anonymous Hebrew translation which was preserved by Moses of Narboni. References are to the edition and translation by Kalman P. Bland, *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni* (New York: the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982). There is much talk about the human disposition or preparation in this work, but I have no way of knowing whether the original Arabic used *fiṭra;* the Hebrew is *canah* (כנה; cf. ET in Bland, 85 (Hebrew in Rosenthal, 108)). For example, he speaks of those who by their constitution are stronger in reasoning and thus "possess a more perfect intellect" (ET in Bland, 36). At the same time, one's skills in speculation are honed by "constant usage of the sciences and by his progress from science to science" (ibid.). Similarly, Ibn Rushd speaks of the differences between men based on three things, two of them being "the strength of the hylic intellect" as well as "acquired perfection" (ET in Bland, 59). He immediately further emphasizes the importance of both disposition and education when he notes that "the question of whether it is possible that this state [i.e. perfection of the intellect] be attained by an individual without study is one which allows for considerate investigation" (ibid.); this seems another reference to Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy* and something Ibn Rushd later in the work explicitly denies. Narboni in his commentary notes that both al-Ghazālī and Ibn Ṭufayl disagree with this statement (cf. ET in Bland, 61).

[130] ET in Bland*,* section 10 (p. 59f). Narboni is quick to point out that like Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* affirms such a view (cf. ibid., 61).

[131] ET in Bland, 108.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 108f.

[134] Ibn Rushd also speaks of this idea of retirement at the end of the philosopher's life (cf. *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic,* ed. and trans. Erwin Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 203).

[135] ET in Bland, 109. I should note that Ibn Rushd's text here is slightly unclear as he seems to posit the caveat that society serves humanity only insofar as "nothing exists in this society to impede the attainment of felicity" (ibid., 108). If this is not the case, living with men might mean that one will "acquire those forms which impede the attainment of felicity" (ibid., 109). Similarly, Narboni in his commentary notes that Ibn Rushd believes that "man, who is political by nature, needs society" (ibid., 110) in the case that "the leaders are golden, i.e. philosophical," meaning that the society resembles a Platonic *polis* (ibid.). What is not clear, then, is what those are to do who find themselves in a less than ideal society since, as Ibn Rushd himself acknowledges, such a society does impact people's perfection (which is exactly when—and only when— Ibn Bājja recommends solitude; it seems Ibn Rushd is just a lot more optimistic about the possibility of a well-functioning society, which is less surprising given his own involvement in and recognition by the politics of his day). However, taking into account Ibn Rushd's other statements in the *Faṣl* and his comments on the *Republic* (see below), it seems he does not believe in isolation as a recommended means of attaining perfection.

some thoughts on Ibn Bājja's support of solitude in another place, namely the appendix to his *Epitome of the* De Anima.[136]

However, we can gain a more holistic image of Ibn Rushd's political ideas from his commentary on Plato's *Republic.*[137] Unfortunately, the Arabic original of this commentary is lost, which prevents us from saying much about the use of *fiṭra* here. Instead, the commentary is available in a Hebrew translation by Samuel b. Yehuda of Marseilles (d. ca. 1340). However, as Leaman notes, there are issues with the "reliability and integrity" of that and other Hebrew translations.[138] Additionally, it is somewhat of a strange work. Not only is this commentary Ibn Rushd's only known engagement with a Platonic work;[139] it is also difficult to classify as a commentary, as Leaman points out: on the one hand, "there is quite a lot of material which merely replicates and abbreviates Plato's text," making it somewhat of a short commentary; on the other hand, "the text seems also to be rather like a middle commentary, with some analysis of Plato's arguments and a very definite selection of passages and exclusion of others on philosophical grounds."[140] The work as a whole, while offering us the most comprehensive treatment of political matters by Ibn Rushd, should thus be treated with a grain of salt.

Be that as it may, the idea that society is fundamental to human beings is clear throughout his commentary on the *Republic*. Already in the opening, Ibn Rushd emphasizes that people cannot

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[136] For a description of the uncertain manuscript situation of this appendix see the comments by Bland on p. 16 n.34. Narboni himself comments on Ibn Rushd's note here that this has not reached him, just as he cannot yet access the original by Ibn Bājja. What he does have, however, is Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, which according to him also "describes the regimen of the solitary" (ibid., 110). Looking at the appendix, I cannot, however, find anything relevant there (see Aḥmad F. Ahwānī (ed.), *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-nafs* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Naḥḍat al-Miṣriyya, 1950); Deborah Black has translated this edition, *Epitome of the* de Anima (Toronto, 2009); see pp. 42-52 for the appendix).

[137] References in the following are to the edition and translation by Erwin Rosenthal, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).

[138] *Averroes and His Philosophy,* 119.

[139] Most likely he chose to comment on it since Aristotle's *Politics* was unavailable to him, yet he had the desire to write on political science.

[140] *Averroes and His Philosophy,* 119. On the 'esotericist' engagement with this text, especially with regard to Ibn Rushd's omission of many of the Platonic stories and myths, see ibid., pp. 123-126

acquire the necessary virtues for perfection on their own, "without the help of other persons."[141] Rather, a human being is "in need of others" for both the acquisition of virtues and the "necessities of life as well."[142] "Therefore, he is a political being by nature (Heb. *teva*)."[143] Ibn Rushd does not in fact even think it likely, if not close to impossible, for a single person to attain all the human perfections (meaning, speculative, intellectual, and ethical virtues as well as the practical arts). "Because it is impossible for the human perfections to be attained except dispersed severally over a limited group [of people], all individuals of this [particular] kind differ in disposition in accordance with the difference of these perfections."[144] While the community of humans is thus clearly divided, Ibn Rushd also folds hierarchy into this division: people not only assist each other, "the less perfect follows the wholly perfect as a means of preparing for his perfection, and the wholly perfect benefits the less by giving him the principles of his perfection."[145] As a result, community is needed for all to flourish, yet that community is by its very nature (namely the fact that it brings together all kinds of people) divided. For Ibn Rushd, this division also entails a hierarchy. This argument sounds very close to al-Fārābī's political writings, in which he used the term *fiṭra* to refer to these basic dispositions that create the need for society. Second, the Hebrew term used here is not the standard '*teva'* for nature, but rather a term derived from the verb for 'to create,' '*yezirah.'* While reconstruction of this type is hard, we can at least say that Ibn Rushd is clear that by created disposition, humans differ in such a way as to necessitate our political existence, as well as dictate the ordering of that political existence. Ibn Rushd thus appears to run two arguments together, which nicely line up with his double use of *fiṭra* as something that both unites and divides. First, all humans need society because they are finite and hence cannot reach

[141] ET in Rosenthal, 113.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid. (cf. Hebrew in Rosenthal, 22).
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., 114. It appears here as if it is possible to be fully perfect for Ibn Rushd.

perfection alone. Second, the need for society that all have is due to the fact that humans have differing abilities. On a social level these differences make for hierarchies. As a result, society is structured according to people's talents and deficiencies, with the more able guiding and educating those less so.[146]

The second argument, that the society that all need is divided into groups *and* in fact organized in levels, becomes very clear when Ibn Rushd discusses the analogy between city and soul. Here he notes that Plato's vision of justice is in fact based on an idea of assistance and leadership that is made possible by people's different abilities and natures. Those "perfect in the several kinds of human perfection" are likened to the "rational part of the soul"[147] and as such rule over the other citizens or parts of the soul. This indeed is justice, whether it is the parts of the soul or "every citizen following the activity for which he is best qualified by nature (*teva*)."[148] As he makes very clear, such justice can only be achieved "when the classes of the State are subordinated to what speculative science and those who master it decree."[149] The same applies to the individual, which must be ruled by the rational part while each of the other parts "does what it has to do in proper measure and time."[150] Ibn Rushd then also examines the different ways in which people can acquire virtues depending on their abilities,[151] as well as the virtues and crafts people are

[146] And as we will see below, for Ibn Rushd society really does benefit all factions since the lower provide the higher more basic services of handicraft.
[147] ET in Rosenthal, 114.
[148] Ibid., 115 (Heb. in Rosenthal, 23). Ibn Rushd returns to the city-soul analogy and the idea of harmony on pp. 161-163 and 218 (when discussing tyranny).
[149] ET in Rosenthal, 115.
[150] Ibid. Ibn Rushd reiterates this when he notes later that like patients and doctors, the citizens need to "completely trust and submit" to the leadership of the philosopher (ibid., 181).
[151] Cf. ET in Rosenthal, 117f. As he writes, "it is […] fitting for every man to acquire of the human perfection as much as lies in his nature to acquire, and in accordance with his preparation for it" (ET in Rosenthal, 117). The process of acquisition then depends on people's abilities, meaning whether they can be taught in certain, non-demonstrative ways or need to be coerced. We may note in this context, however, that Ibn Rushd disagrees with Plato that only one nation (i.e. the Greeks) are predisposed to speculative perfection. While nations certainly bend towards some virtues more than others, abilities are generally spread across all the nations (cf. ibid., 120).

predisposed for by nature (*teva*).[152] With respect to the practical crafts, the idea is very clearly that a) people are predisposed to certain crafts by nature; and b) each person is predisposed for one craft alone.[153] As a result, people ought to be selected for and trained in the thing they are naturally best suited to. While there is, at the same time, no question regarding the need to educate all, there is a very clear division of people by their nature or disposition that provides not merely the basis for our vision of justice but also shapes the human need for society as well as its particular form.[154] And, as I have said, this form is hierarchical.

But it is not only the social structure that takes into account what people are naturally disposed towards.[155] Similarly, procreation and indeed life and death build on one's place in society. And that place is ordered. Following Plato, Ibn Rushd argues that "anyone unable to be truly possessed of all the virtues need not be cured" by a physician.[156] This is indeed why "Socrates preferred death to life when he saw that it was impossible for him to live a human life."[157] If there is no hope for permanent betterment, there is no reason in attempting a cure. Whether in the case of chronic physical ailments or permanent moral deprivation, for some death is better than life. Thus, we read that a person of "an evil nature and [one that] does not accept cure, that is correction of the soul,"[158] is best put to death by a judge. At the same time, ensuring the continuation of the leading class is achieved by a breeding program that ensures that people "are formed by nature for

[152] Cf. ET in Rosenthal, 120f.
[153] Cf. ET in Rosenthal, 121-123, as well as 135 on the dispositions of the guardians and soldiers for their tasks in society.
[154] As he notes in his discussion of the education of the guardians, even if all receive the proper training some do not make it and "will remain at a stage which they cannot pass" because their nature lacks certain capacities for full perfection (cf. ibid., 124). What is needed is the right combination of natural endowment and education (cf. also 157 and 198 where Ibn Rushd describes the development of the philosopher leaving the cave and being at once "by nature disposed to philosophy" and in need of a step-by-step education (which he elaborates, following Plato in the subsequent pages)).
[155] Cf. ET in Rosenthal, 123-137 on the proper means of education and the place of such things as tales, poetry, music and the like.
[156] ET in Rosenthal, 138.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 140.

their customary occupation."[159] And in the Platonic precedent, the myth of metals upholds this program.[160] The worst that can happen to the state, and its reason for downfall, is when "someone undertakes work in it for which he is not disposed by nature (*teva*)."[161] The political implications of people's natural disposition are thus very clear and very weighty indeed, affecting not only the ordering of society into those ruling and ruled but also the life and death of its members.[162]

However, as I mentioned before: Ibn Rushd, like al-Fārābī, is very insistent on the use of and need for education, despite his affirmation of the crucial importance of dispositions.[163] Thus, when discussing the philosopher's nature in the second treatise, he emphasizes both the need for certain dispositions (such as for the study of the theoretical sciences in the case of the philosophers)[164] and the fact that dispositions are insufficient. He likens the philosopher to the "seeds of the best plants when they cannot find proper soul and nourishment" (and, as a result, "are transformed into the very worst of the bad kinds"); for like the seeds of plants, "so it is with the excellent natures when they grow up in these [i.e. bad] states and are badly educated."[165] Later he reiterates that "of the human perfection nothing but the dispositions alone exist by nature, or the

[159] Ibid., 142.
[160] Cf. ET in Rosenthal, 142-143. On the correct pairing of guardians with women of the same nature, and how this applies to all the different groups of society, see also pp. 163-170. As Leaman notes, "some of the Platonic arguments in favor of the abolition of private property, the desirable disappearance of gold and silver, the appropriate size of cities, not to mention the communal living arrangements for women and children, are very different from Islamic forms of life, and yet Averroes produces summaries of Plato's ideas for such social arrangements without much in the way of personal comment" (*Averroes and His Philosophy,* 120).
[161] ET in Rosenthal, 142 (Heb. in Rosenthal, 40).
[162] This is also clear from the discussion of the dangers of people born in the guardian class but who have a disposition for harming the people for some reason (cf. ibid., 143f).
[163] NB: should the less gifted or the more gifted be assumed to need more honing/ be encouraged to hone their skills? Al-Fārābī emphasized that talent and disposition is not enough and that those who have lesser talents but more education could take over those more talented but who let their talents wither. What is the implication of such claims? In either case, Ibn Rushd appears to agree with his predecessors. It seems noteworthy that the emphasis is usually on the education of the elites with the *falāsifa*, rarely do we hear about the need or ability to educate the masses and what benefit education might bring them/allow them to lift their less excellent dispositions.
[164] Cf. ET in Rosenthal, 178.
[165] Ibid., 182. Ibn Rushd makes clear that while such people can be a source of great harm to the state, the same is true of the inverse (i.e. people "who devote themselves to philosophy without possessing these qualities to perfection," ibid.).

beginnings of the course [leading] to their attainment. For there is not [sufficient] power in nature that these perfections should reach us in their completeness. Rather do they come to pass only by will [power] and skill."[166] Education is fundamental for all.

Yet while again education benefits all, it is not beneficial to all in the same way. For Ibn Rushd emphasizes again that while all are born to some disposition, not all are born with the highest: "if it is possible only for some men to attain all or most of the perfections, and if others are restricted by nature to something other than the highest degree of them, then it is evident that the second kind of men must accept dominion, and the first kind will be master."[167] Ibn Rushd makes this point even clearer when he argues that not all men are disposed to be masters;[168] indeed some are "servants by nature (*teva*) and accept domination naturally."[169] While it is each person's purpose to "rise to that existence as far as his nature [is qualified] to rise,"[170] there are clear natural and educational limits and they are what determine society and its shape. As in his reading of *fiṭra,* his politics are based on the idea of a shared basis, explored further in different ways by different people. While all need society and all need education, their role in society and their potential for achievements in education differ vastly.

Sociality and education are thus clearly fundamental for Ibn Rushd's vision of human perfection. The questions that had occupied Ibn Bājja's or Ibn Ṭufayl's treatises regarding the life and fate of the solitary philosophers and their autodidactic abilities do not appear to interest him. While, as we saw in his comments on the *Epistle of Conjunction,* Ibn Rushd leaves open the

[166] ET in Rosenthal, 187; the Hebrew used here is '*hacnah'* (67), a term already familiar from the *Epistle of Conjunction*. On the necessity of both disposition and educations see also178 in ibid.
[167] Ibid. 184.
[168] Cf. ibid., 190.
[169] Ibid., 191 (Heb. in Rosenthal, 69).
[170] Ibid., 192.

question of what one is to do in a less than ideal state (given that humans can influence each other negatively), he is quite clear in his comments on the *Republic:*

> When by chance a true philosopher grows up in these States [meaning the less than perfect ones] he is in the position of a man who has come among wild beasts. He is indeed not obliged to do harm along with them, yet he can also not be sure in his own mind that these wild beasts will not oppose him. Therefore he will have recourse to isolation and live a solitary life. He will [thus] be lacking the highest perfection which he can attain only in this State [meaning, the ideal] as described in [our] argument.[171]

While one may attempt to live in isolation, perfection is out of the question in such circumstances. It is clear then from the multiple places in which Ibn Rushd denies the salutary effects of solitude and the possibility of autodidacticism, as well as from his insistence on sociability, that his views are different from those of his two Andalusian predecessors. Generally speaking, perfection for the philosopher is attainable only in the state.[172] Thus, he writes regarding the education of the philosopher: "Since man can only exist in the State, he can attain [his] end only in so far as he is part of the State."[173] As Leaman notes, "it may be possible for the philosopher as *mutawaḥḥid* to achieve a certain level of happiness in isolation from society, but this should be regarded as a second-best option."[174] Much better than solitude is a situation "where he is fully integrated with his society and can allow his specifically human characteristics to flourish in company with those of other citizens."[175] As di Giovanni has put it, Ibn Rushd hoped that through his efforts, "philosophy would no longer be a divertissement for few individuals consigned to the solitary life that was celebrated by Ibn Ṭufayl, but an activity universally honored and socially recognized."[176] Following al-Fārābī, Ibn Rushd thus moved the locus of philosophy back to society.

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[171] ET in Rosenthal, 183.
[172] I do not think the issue of completely failed states and his discussion of Socrates' choice of death can be fully squared with Ibn Rushd's general insistence that the state is the best home for the philosopher. But even if he agrees with Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl regarding the extreme example of philosophers under threat or in isolation, he does not take such scenarios as his central topic or issue of concern.
[173] Ibid., 184.
[174] *Averroes and His Philosophy,* 158.
[175] Ibid.
[176] "Averroes, Philosopher of Islam," 16.

While there is thus significant agreement with al-Fārābī, Ibn Rushd diverges on a related concern that had come up in our discussion of previous *falāsifa:* the benefits of religion for the philosophers or the intellectual elites. As Majid Fakhry notes, Ibn Rushd is the only one of the *falāsifa* to explicitly address this question.[177] The fact that he does pursue this question fits with our broader insight that he makes frequent use of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature. To recap, the issue I had raised in response to the arguments of the previous *falāsifa* is the following way: since philosophers—as claimed by al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Ṭufayl—can get to the truth directly, what need is there for them for religion, a form of accessing the truth suited for the masses? While none of our previous authors had explicitly addressed this question, Ibn Rushd takes it up directly. The answer is practical: in order to fully participate in society—a necessity, as he had argued, for even the most excellent—the philosophers need to be conversant in religion.

The first step of this argument is that religion is the language of the majority. Religion can reach many people, philosophy can only reach a few. As Ibn Rushd writes in the fourth discussion (*Concerning the philosopher's denial of bodily resurrection*) of the section on the natural sciences of the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut:*

> the religions are, according to the philosophes, obligatory, since they lead towards wisdom in a way universal to all human beings, philosophy only leads a certain number of people to the knowledge of intellectual happiness, and they therefore have to learn wisdom, whereas religions seek the instruction of the masses generally.[178]

Now since "the existence of the learned class is only perfected and its full happiness attained by participation with the class of the masses, the general doctrine is also obligatory for the existence and life of this special class."[179] As we have already seen, for Ibn Rush nobody is happy outside society and indeed cannot achieve perfection alone. Given this strong emphasis on society as the

[177] Cf. *Averroes (Ibn Rushd),* 115.
[178] ET in van den Bergh, 1: 360. This includes, Ibn Rushd makes clear, also the religious laws.
[179] Ibid.

necessary sphere of life for all, including the philosophers, religion takes on a more important role. Since the masses live through religion, participating in religion is beneficial for the philosophers as well, as it allows participating in social life, i.e. to influence people beyond their own.[180] Ibn Rushd thus answers a concern left open by al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Ṭufayl: the role religion might play in the lives of those who do not depend on it as a way to access truth. For Ibn Rushd the prophets are wise, yet not all wise people can be prophets as they lack political abilities. Or, as Ibn Rushd concludes, "every prophet (*nabī*) is a philosopher (*ḥakīm*) but not every philosopher a prophet; the learned, however, are those of whom it is said that they are the heirs of the prophets."[181] To be a prophet and be able to sway people, even the most intellectually adept need to speak the language of religion.[182]

While it is hard to say much about the role of *fiṭra* in his most explicitly political work, his arguments regarding the human being and her need for society offer important insights despite the lack of our key terms.[183] Instead, having paid attention to the themes familiar to us from previous

[180] Additionally, Ibn Rushd notes that while it is inappropriate for an excellent person to "despise the doctrines in which he has been brought up" (ET in van den Bergh, 1: 360) or explain them unfairly, he also notes that such a man must choose "the best religion of his period" (ibid.). It is clear that for Ibn Rushd this is Islam (cf. ET in van den Bergh, 1: 361).

[181] ET in van den Bergh, 1: 361 (modified).

[182] I think much here hinges on Ibn Rushd's strong affirmation of humanity's inherently social nature. *Because* happiness is social, the philosophers need to be able to occupy a role in society. As a result, religion is important as a means of communication. Al-Fārābī, as we saw, also believes in the importance of society. However, religion for him is more clearly an inferior form of discourse appropriate for those unable to engage in philosophy. He does not address the question of the benefits religion might offer to the philosopher.

[183] Ibn Rushd's comments on the *Nicomachean Ethics* offer some additional insight regarding his ethical and political views. This work is not preserved in Arabic, save 30 small fragments (Lawrence Berman, "Excerpts from the lost Arabic original of Ibn Rushd's Middle Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics," *Oriens* 20 (1967): 31-59). However, there are medieval Latin and Hebrew translations (on this, see also Berman, "Ibn Rushd's *Middle Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* in Medieval Hebrew Literature," in *Multiple Averroes*, 287-321; as well as Jerzy B. Korolec, "Mittlerer Kommentar von Averroes zur *Nikomachischen Ethik* des Aristoteles," *Mediaevalia philosophica Polonorum,* 31 (1992): 61-118). In a recent article, Frédérique Woerther has noted that in his comments Ibn Rushd here reiterates what we saw before, that he believes ethical judgments (and indeed also political ones) to be the result of the opinions of some learned men or merely widely accepted, rather than demonstrative (cf. "Averroes' Goals in the *Paraphrase* (Middle Commentary) of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics,*" in *Interpreting Averroes,* 231). At the same time, these dialectical opinions can become the basis for a demonstrative science of ethics in which philosophers use dialectical methods to extract from dialectical opinions what is true, leaving a 'scientific' or 'demonstrative' end product that "is scientific and demonstrative insofar as it has been subjected to dialectical examination and has been successfully demonstrated to be true" (ibid., 235; cf. also pp. 233-235). While this image of a demonstrative science

thinkers, we notice shifts in emphasis and even efforts to address issues previously left unclear. Most importantly, Ibn Rushd's levelling and diverging view of humanity spills into a political vision that strongly emphasizes a general human need for society and a hierarchical ordering of that society. The issue at the bottom of both these affirmations is diverging human abilities. Because all have different talents, it is necessary that humans come together and share these talents. However, not all talents are made equally. As in the example of the soul, the most rational guide the less rational. As a result, the diversity of talents means—once humans have come together—that society is not only divided into groups but ordered into levels, too. While Ibn Rushd thus agrees with his intellectual predecessors that people are of varied dispositions and, on the basis of these dispositions, suited to specific tasks in the state, his political thought has also taken several lessons from the more extreme claims of Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Bājja. Happiness is possible in society alone, education is needed by all—even the most gifted; in fact, especially them. Importantly, this education includes religion as a useful means of communication for all and not just as a concession to the intellectually inferior. While Ibn Rushd thus returns to many of al-Fārābī's points on the matter of politics, his stance on religion as something of benefit to the elite sets him apart from the other three thinkers investigated in this dissertation.

IV. *Fiṭra* in the Commentaries

As I mentioned before, besides—and maybe as part of—serving an active role in the Muslim community of his time, Ibn Rushd saw himself as "preserving and continuing the Aristotelian tradition."[184] In practice, this chiefly meant getting "to the heart of the Aristotelian

offers one way of trying to understand the conflicting statements regarding such a science in al-Fārābī, Ibn Rushd unfortunately does not provide more details than that.

[184] Paul Thom, "Averroes' Logic," in *Interpreting Averroes*, 95.

texts as he received them in Arabic translation"[185] by composing highly influential commentaries. Generally speaking, Ibn Rushd wrote three types of commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus: the short, middle, and long commentaries. The first type (Ar. *jawāmiʿ* or *mukhtaṣar*) were mere summaries; the second (Ar. *talkhīṣ*) had some quotations from the Aristotelian text and made basic points of interpretation and explication; the third type (Ar. *sharh* or *tafsīr*) were his later works and contained the entirety of the Aristotelian text with extensive comments.[186] As Taylor notes, these latter works are "generally thought to contain his most mature thought. The first of these was the Long Commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* (ca. 1180–3). Following in measured succession were long commentaries on the *De Anima* (ca. 1186?), on the *Physics* (1186), on the *De Caelo* (1188), and on the *Metaphysics* (1190)."[187] Given this variety of commentaries, Fakhry describes Ibn Rushd as the "most meticulous expositor of Aristotle's philosophy in any language or clime."[188] According to Fakhry (and there do exist differing estimations), Ibn Rushd wrote 38 commentaries, 28 of which are available in Hebrew, 15 in Arabic, 4 in both Arabic and Hebrew, and 9 in Hebrew alone.[189]

The reason we would suspect *fiṭra* to come up in Ibn Rushd's commentaries is its connection to the first principles in the thought of previous *falāsifa*. And broadly speaking, Ibn Rushd agrees with the epistemological picture familiar to us from al-Fārābī in particular: as Adamson has noted, while religious reasoning in his thought is associated with the non-demonstrative methods of dialectic and rhetoric, demonstrative reasoning is "grounded in certain

[185] Paul Thom, "Averroes' Logic," in *Interpreting Averroes*, 95.
[186] As Helmut Gatje and Gregor Schoeler note, Ibn Rushd was dependent in his comments on the Arabic translation of Aristotle, as he did not know Greek or Syriac ("Averroes Schriften zur Logik. Der arabische Text der zweiten Analytiken im Grossen Kommentar des Averroes," *Zeitschrift der Deutsche Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 130 (1980): 559).
[187] Taylor, "Averroes: Religious Dialectic and Aristotelian Philosophical Thought," 181.
[188] Fakhry, *Averroes (Ibn Rushd),* 165.
[189] Ibid., 168.

first principles."[190] However, as we shall see, for Ibn Rushd these first principles seem to have less connection to *fiṭra* and its sense of innateness than they had for al-Fārābī. Instead, the first principles are "derived (only) from sense-experience."[191] This impression regarding a move away from embedded first principles fits into a great interpretative claim regarding Ibn Rushd's entire project, namely that he wanted to move away from both al-Fārābī's and Ibn Sīnā's neo-Platonizing and towards a pure Aristotelianism.[192] Regarding the former, he wrote a treatise explicitly comparing al-Fārābī's approach to logic with Aristotle's; and regarding the latter we know especially from the *Tahāfut* about Ibn Rushd's grievances. It is difficult to substantiate such a large claim through attention to *fiṭra*; however, what we do see in the commentaries is that Ibn Rushd— unlike al-Fārābī— does not think of *fiṭra* as the source of the first principles. While al-Fārābī in his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* had not used the term *fiṭra,* he did posit it as the source of demonstrative knowledge through many of his other writings. Ibn Rushd, in contrast, does use the term *fiṭra* in several of his commentaries, but not in this technical sense. This insight fits with a much larger point; that Ibn Rushd disputed the innateness of these principles. Rather than in us by birth, they are the formed on the basis of repeated sensing and thus acquired.[193]

The non-technical use of *fiṭra* is well illustrated in the short commentary on the *Categories.*[194] Here Ibn Rushd uses *fiṭra* once when offering examples of dialectic as a practice which, unlike demonstration, is just based on a generally accepted premise. The first class of those

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[190] Adamson, *Interpreting Averroes,* 4.
[191] *Interpreting Averroes,* 4.
[192] Cf. Majid Fakhry, *Averroes (Ibn Rushd)*, 7-11. As Stroumsa points out, beyond the general attraction of Aristotelianism, this move towards a stricter version of Aristotelianism in part was due to a desire on part of the rulers to distance themselves from Shīʿī Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism" and thus the rival Fāṭimids (*Andalus and Sefarad,* 159).
[193] Using *fiṭra* in connection to these principles would undermine the effort of arguing for the acquisition of these principles. Attention to *fiṭra* thus again illustrates a larger point Ibn Rushd wants to make, though admittedly through its absence.
[194] References are to the English and Arabic text translated and edited by Butterworth in *Averroes' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics," "Rhetoric," and "Poetics"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977). I indicate when I follow or modify Butterworth's translation and when I offer my own.

generally accepted premises are those "well-known (*mashhūra*) by everybody."[195] Regarding these generally accepted premises, "it is possible for all of the different nations to meet in agreement on this one despite the variance in their sects and their *fiṭar*."[196] One example of such a generally agreed but not certain premise is "that it is good to thank a benefactor or that it is necessary to respect one's parents."[197] What is interesting here is that on the one hand, basic ethical commitments seem to be included in the *fiṭra,* which describes a people's character. And, by implication, these characters differ. At the same time, *fiṭra* is clearly associated with something that is merely a widespread opinion, rather than certain, and thus outside the realm of demonstration. And while these first, widespread opinions are 'the most noble' and most accepted (unlike the lesser categories of things only accepted by most, or some, or only a few experts), the contrast with demonstration is clear.[198]

This realization should not surprise us since the entire context of the *Categories* (as with the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*) is not demonstrative reasoning but how to influence others. As Butterworth notes, all three of these short commentaries give us insight into Ibn Rushd's views about the relation between religion, philosophy, and politics as they illustrate his conviction that the theologians were confusing the common people with their complex ideas.[199] At the same time, the dialectic method of the theologians, Ibn Rushd believes, is founded on less certain principles than the demonstrative one of the philosophers. There is a double charge present then: the theologians are taking their art to both the wrong task and the wrong people. As there is the right method for certain questions, there is also a right method for certain people. For the common

[195] AR in Butterworth (1977), 158 (my translation).
[196] ET in Butterworth (1977), 51 (modified); AR in Butterworth 158.
[197] ET in Butterworth (1977), 51.
[198] In the other two short commentaries, on the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics,* Ibn Rushd uses *ṭabʿ* to speak of general nature (Butterworth, *Averroes' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics,' "Rhetoric," and "Poetics,"* AT 182 and 205 respectively)
[199] Cf. *Averroes' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics,' "Rhetoric," and "Poetics,*" 21.

people, widespread opinions are sufficient for their virtuous formation; they do not need full veracity. As Butterworth puts it, "the basic and explicit argument of these treatises is that opinion usually suffices for decent human life."[200] Taking into account the example of the most noble, generally accepted opinions that all can agree on (that I just cited above), we can agree with Butterworth when he notes that for Ibn Rushd "moral habits [are] based on what is generally accepted, not on what is certain."[201] According to Butterworth, Ibn Rushd thus rehabilitates common opinion through a "strong defense of its practical merits."[202] Given this broad context, it is interesting to see Ibn Rushd invoke *fiṭra* in his discussion of the widely accepted premises, rather than in a technical sense. Yet, as we saw, the meaning is closest to a certain people's temperament that causes differences across nations. The maximum we can thus say is to speak of a broad contextual affiliation that seems different than that of Ibn Rushd's predecessors.

The middle commentary on the *Categories*[203] affirms this impression. For Ibn Rushd here uses *fiṭra* slightly differently than al-Fārābī had done in his engagement with the Aristotelian text. In the section on 'quality' (*kayfiyya*), Ibn Rushd describes the Aristotelian account of how an individual is divided into four genera, the first being habit (*malaka*) and state (*ḥāl*) and the second the natural faculty (*quwwa ṭabīʿiyya*). However, unlike al-Fārābī, there is no reference to *fiṭra* in his discussion of the natural faculty,[204] despite the fact that he uses the same examples of running and wrestling as endowed.[205] However, when Ibn Rushd gets to affective qualities (such as tastes,

[200] *Averroes' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics,' "Rhetoric," and "Poetics,*" 40.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid. His "goal was to show why the arts based on opinion were best suited for certain functions but also why they had to be limited in their application to those functions. In most practical situations, time restrictions and the intellectual shortcomings of other people make it difficult to attain demonstrative certainty" (ibid.).
[203] Arabic references are to the edition contained in *Talkhīṣ manṭiq li-ʾAristū li-ʾIbn Rushd,* ed. Jīrār Jahāmī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-lubnānī, 1992), mujallad 2-3. There is also a translation by Butterworth, *Averroes Middle Commentaries on Aristotle's* Categories *and* De Interpretatione (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983).
[204] Cf. AR in Jahāmī, 47-48.
[205] *ṭabʿ* and *ṭabīʿa* occur in the sense of 'nature;' see for example AR in Jahāmī, 35, 40f, 69, 71.

colors, and tactile things) or the third aspect of quality, he uses *fiṭra* alongside *ṭabʿ*. What matters is a contrast he draws between the ways in which taste and touch give rise to an affection, while colors are due to affection. Thus, the sweetness of honey, the bitterness of aloe or the heat and cold create an affection in us if we taste something or touch something of a certain temperature. However, this is not so with colors. They are affective because they are the result of affection:

> the cause of anyone being red or yellow is from the *fiṭar,* which means from the beginning of his life, or by *ṭabʿ* and the reason for that is that in its earliest formation his make-up was affected by the kind of affection which brings about the redness accompanying embarrassment and the yellowness accompanying fright.[206]

While such affections are "firmly established and pass away with difficulty,"[207] they are accidents and not essential. *Fiṭra* is thus used here to point to something not inherent, though seemingly natural.

However, Ibn Rushd emphasizes in the following that these affective qualities are not quickly removed (thus they are 'affective qualities,' no 'affections'). Unlike a mere reddening because of an embarrassment, real 'affective qualities' are rooted in the *ṭabʿ* and *jibla* and thus different from a passing affection (however long or short such an affection might last).[208] Extending this contrast to the soul, Ibn Rushd—still speaking of the 'accidents of the soul'—notes that only those "accidents of the soul are 'affective qualities' that are by *ṭabʿ* and firmly established;"[209] the things which are "accidental and do not belong to man by ṭabʿ and temperament (*mizāj*)"[210] are merely affections. Thus, you can be angry because of a certain event without being irascible. What is significant here, then, is both the parallel, and in fact more frequent, use of the term '*ṭabʿ* as well as the general context of both of these terms as sources of qualities (though qualities that were,

[206] ET in Butterworth (1983) 64 (modified); AR in Jahāmī, 49.
[207] ET in Butterworth (1983), 64.
[208] Cf. AR in Jahāmī, 49.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid.

seemingly very early, acquired).[211] As in the short commentary, the sense is one of being firmly anchored but not necessary or absolute.

Demonstration is in contrast with the idea of something being firm but not essential. In his short commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*[212] (*Kitāb al-burhān*), Ibn Rushd affirms what is well-known to us by now: that demonstration (*burhān*) is a form of syllogism that is based on certain (*yaqīnī*), necessary (*ḍurūrī*) premises, and essential (*dhātī*) premises;[213] a few lines down he also adds that they are universal and unchanging.[214] These premises are firmly anchored in the human soul, unmoved by objections or doubts.[215] After having gone through the characteristics of these premises, Ibn Rushd then argues that the premises that are at the bottom of demonstration are either "known from the beginning"[216]—and these are the first premises—or "the results of composed syllogisms whose premises are known from the beginning"[217] (which gives them their name, 'combined demonstrative syllogisms'). In the end, all demonstration is based on premises that are known "in themselves and from the beginning."[218] Now these premises that are known from the beginning are of two types: "one of them is that they are obtained by nature (*bil-ṭibāʿ/ṭabʿ* (in another ms.);"[219] and "the second is that they are obtained by experience (*bil-tajriba*)."[220] Given what we have seen in al-Fārābī, one might expect the term *fiṭra* here as the source of the first

[211] We may add that in his Middle commentary on *De Interpretatione* (in *Talkhīṣ manṭiq li-ʾAriṣṭū li-ʾIbn Rushd,* ed. Jīrār Jahāmī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-lubnānī, 1992), mujallad 2-3) Ibn Rushd makes plenty of use of the root *ṭ-b-ʿ* in the sense of a mere nature or natural, in contrast with convention (see uses of *ṭabʿ* on p. 81, 83, 86, 87 and *ṭabīʿa/ṭabīʿī* on 86, 99, 123) However, in the context of discussing the idea that the category of the possible be eliminated (only retaining the necessary), including considering the implications of such thinking, he does note that. such ideas are in conflict with "that which we have been created (*fuṭirnā*) upon" (AR in Jahāmī, 98).
[212] Many thanks to Charles Butterworth for kindly sharing his soon-to-be published edition of the commentary with me.
[213] Cf. *Short Commentary on the* Posterior Analytics, §1, p. 2.
[214] Cf. ibid., §3, p. 87.
[215] Cf. ibid., §2, p. 3.
[216] Ibid., §7, p. 6 (my translation).
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.

premises. This is particularly so as Ibn Rushd goes on to describe this first type in nearly identical terms to al-Fārābī: these premises give us necessary certainty from the beginning "without us knowing whence or how we obtained them;"[221] and they include things such as "the whole is bigger than the part."[222] As Deborah Black notes, Ibn Rushd here "adopts the standard account of his predecessors regarding the quasi-innate 'feel' of such propositions."[223]

However, as we saw from our discussion of the *Categories,* rather than anchor certainty, *fiṭra* is at the bottom of what is widespread. In line with this lack of connection between *fiṭra* and epistemological certainty through the first principles, Ibn Rushd—as Black argues— quickly lost his commitment to a distinction between empirical and nonempirical primaries. Instead, he would argue that these seemingly innate principles are in fact acquired. In this, Black argues, Ibn Rushd follows Aristotle. Quoting from the *Epitome of the* De Anima:

> Whenever one considers how the intelligibles arise in us, and especially the intelligibles from which empirical premises are composed, it is clear that in order for them to arise in us we must first sense and then imagine [the object], after which we will be able to grasp the universal. For this reason anyone who is lacking in one of the types of the sensibles is lacking in some intelligible […]. Likewise it is likely that this is the state of the other type of intelligibles of which we are not aware when they arise nor how they arise [i.e. the natural primaries]. But since their individuals are apprehended by us from the beginning, we do not remember when this state of theirs, which takes hold of us through experience, took hold of us. This is self-evident, for these intelligibles are not another genus of intelligibles different from the empirical ones, and for this reason it is necessary that the way they come about in us should in some way be the same.[224]

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[221] *Short Commentary on the* Posterior Analytics, §7, p. 6. Ibn Rushd was familiar with al-Fārābī's *Kitāb al-Burhān* since he mentions it frequently (e.g. §11, p. 10f; §12, p. 11; §32, p. 18f); however, it is also true that while al-Fārābī in many places connected *fiṭra* with the first premises, he (particularly in his *Kitāb al-Burhān*) does not use *fiṭra* but rather *ṭabʿ* (see my discussion of this in chapter 3). So maybe this is less significant, since al-Fārābī himself did not use *fiṭra;* however, in many other places he did connect the first principles and *fiṭra* and as far as I can tell, Ibn Rushd never uses *fiṭra* in this technical sense.

[222] Ibid., §7, p. 6. Later on, we learn that philosophy is that art which makes use of these premises (cf. §70, p. 39f). In this context Ibn Rushd also uses *ṭabʿ* again; here he speaks of our ability 'by nature' to cognize something (cf. §70, p. 40). §83, p. 49 he also speaks of 'order by nature (*bil-ṭabʿ*).

[223] Black, "Constructing Averroes' Epistemology," in *Interpreting Averroes,* 97.

[224] Ibid., 98.

According to Black, this elimination of natural premises is part of Ibn Rushd's larger agenda of ridding Aristotelianism of unconscious inferences.[225] Much here is directed at Ibn Sīnā, with whom he explicitly disagrees regarding his view of intuition (*ḥads;* or the idea that we can grasp the middle terms of syllogisms better).[226] For Ibn Rushd, according to Black, we cannot acquire things in dreams and instead need instruction. Taking Aristotle's opening of the *Posterior Analytics* seriously—that all knowledge is tied to instruction—there are thus no shortcuts in the acquisition of knowledge, whether based in first principles or not.[227] That being said, Black concedes that Ibn Rushd remains somehow still interested in the ideas of first principles as introduced by al-Fārābī;[228] but very sparsely and while clearly minimizing their role.[229]

[225] Cf. "Constructing Averroes' Epistemology," 101.
[226] Cf. ibid., 111-114.
[227] Aristotle himself was indeed not clear as to the source of the first principles. While it is certain that these principles are the foundation of proper scientific or demonstrative knowledge (and thus avoid infinite regress), it is unclear how we come to hold these basic principles or *archai* (both in terms of their content and the fact that they are the necessary and basic principles). Marc Gasser-Wingate expresses the general scholarly opinion when he notes that the solution that seems to be posited in the *Posterior Analytics* B19 is induction: "on Aristotle's account our ability to understand things scientifically isn't the result of some innate knowledge within us, but rather the result of our progressive inductive development from basic perceptual knowledge to a sophisticated grasp of the principles proper to some scientific domain" ("Aristotle on Induction and First Principles," *Philosopher's Imprint* 16, no. 4 (2016): 6). We ought to imagine a process moving from sense perception to greater levels of abstraction, until we reach universals; it is thus a repetitive process of growing abstraction (cf. ibid., 9-10). Greg Bayer similarly speaks of a process moving from sense perception via induction to a development of abstract principles ("Coming to Know Principles in Posterior Analytics II 19," *Apeiron* 30 (1990): 109–142) and David Bronstein highlights the role of sense perception as the first step in the acquisition of the first principles (cf. "The Origin and Aim of Posterior Analytics II.19," *Phronesis* 57 (2012): 31). "Perception is the origin because it gives rise, via induction, to the proximate prior knowledge required for learning principles properly speaking – that is, according to the methods set out in II.1-10, 13. If this is right, then Aristotle is neither a naïve inductivist nor a mysterious intuitionist (as the empiricist and rationalist readings of II.19 respectively portray him). Instead, his account of learning first principles appeals to the standard practices of Aristotelian science: explaining and defining" (ibid., 37). In this account Aristotle is anti-Platonist, for whom these principles are innate. Thus, Peter Adamson argues that while for Plato these principles are innate and need to be recollected (cf. "Posterior Analytics II.19: A Dialogue with Plato?" in *Aristotle and the Stoics Reading Plato,* eds. Verity Harte, Mary M. McCabe, Robert W. Sharples, and Anne Sheppard (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2010), 6), for Aristotle we have a capacity for them that needs to be developed (cf. ibid., 12). Ibn Rushd, it seems, falls into the Aristotelian picture while al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā are more Platonists on this issue.
[228] Aristotle speaks of the basic function of the first principles also in the opening of his *Physics* (Phys. 184a10–21). I could not find any interesting commentary by Ibn Rushd in his short commentary on the *Physics* (ed. Joseph M. Puig, *Kitāb al-samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī* (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1939)).
[229] Cf. "Constructing Averroes' Epistemology," 114.

In line with what I just described regarding the *Short Commentary on the* Posterior Analytics*,* Ibn Rushd *Middle Commentary* on the *Posterior Analytics*'s[230] neither envisages *fiṭra* as a source of the first principles. Thus, we learn that as a special subsection of syllogism, demonstration or *burḥan* is built on necessarily true principles (*muqaddamāt*).[231] Ibn Rushd in his description of these principles (unlike al-Fārābī) does not make use of *fiṭra.* Rather, these principles that are necessary to accept and at the bottom of demonstration are known to us "by *ṭabʿ*."[232] However, at the end of the work, Ibn Rushd clarifies that while we obtain the principles (*al-mabādiʾ*)[233] "on account of a faculty (*quwwa*) and a disposition (*ʾistiʿadād*) that exists in us,"[234] the origin of that faculty is ultimately in the senses. Thus he writes: "That faculty (*quwwa*) and that disposition (*ʾistiʿadād*) by which those principles (*mabādiʾ*) are obtained […], this faculty exists in all the animals and in all the animals it is the faculty of sense perception (*al-ḥiss*)."[235] He then emphasizes again that "if things are like that [meaning, the origin of the principles is by sense perception,] then […] we do not obtain them from the beginning; […] rather, they are brought about for us by the repetition of sense perception, time after time."[236] It is a repetitive process of "induction (*istiqrāʾ*),"[237] all made possible by sense perception.[238] There are then no innate principles that are available to some or all humans through nature, far less through the *fiṭra.* Instead, Ibn Rushd affirms—most likely in an effort to return to the original Aristotelian arguments—that

[230] References are to the edition of *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-burḥān* contained in *Talkhīṣ manṭiq li-ʾArisṭū li-ʾIbn Rushd,* ed. Jīrār Jahāmī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-lubnānī, 1992), mujallad 5.
[231] Cf. *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-burḥān,* 388-91.
[232] Ibid., 399. He affirms this basic assertion in his *Long Commentary (Sharḥ)* on the *Posterior Analytics* as he notes in his comments on Aristotle's opening words that the necessarily true principles (*muqaddamāt*) are known to us by by *ṭabʿ* (cf. *Sharḥ al-burhān li-ʾArisṭū wa talkhīṣ al-burhān,* ed. ʿA. Badawi (Kuwait, 1984), 167).
[233] On p. 374 he had clarified that the *mabādiʿ* and the *muqaddamāt* mean the same thing and are, for this purpose, interchangeable terms.
[234] *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-burḥān,* 489.
[235] Ibid., 490.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Unfortunately, Ibn Rushd's comments on section B19 of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytic* (on whether knowledge of the first principles is innate or acquired) are not preserved in our version of his *Long Commentary* (*Sharḥ*) on the *Posterior Analytics* (ed. ʿAbdurraḥmān Badawi (Kuwait, 1984)).

such basic principles are acquired. They might feel 'natural' but they are not in fact. Not using *fiṭra,* a term—as we have seen above—he tied to the idea of God placing something in human nature, thus makes sense. Instead, Ibn Rushd uses the broader *ṭabʿ* to speak of those principles that merely feel natural to us. And when he does use *fiṭra* in the commentaries, it is to discuss what is merely widespread.

Ibn Rushd's comments on the *De Anima*[239] also emphasize that the first principles are not simply in humans but rather formed on the basis of sense perception. In his middle commentary,[240] Ibn Rushd makes it very clear when discussing the agent *nous* or rational faculty that "the first principles (*al-muqaddamāt al-awwal*) […] certainly reach us from the senses (*ʿan al-hiss*), even if we do not know when they reach us from it."[241] Now while he does not explicitly mention examples usually associated with *fiṭra*—such as the whole is bigger than its parts etc.—it is obvious from both the choice of the term 'first principles' and the fact that he seems to invoke the phrase that 'we do not know where they come from' that Ibn Rushd indeed no longer believes in naturally occurring principles at the bottom of demonstration.[242] Rather, such principles are the result of

[239] Aristotle in book 3.5 of the *De Anima* discusses the agent *nous.*

[240] References are to *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima (*Talkhīṣ kitāb al-nafs*), ed. and trans. Alfred L. Ivry (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002). The long commentary is no longer extant in Arabic but available in Latin (*Long Commentary on the* De Anima *of Aristotle,* trans. Richard C. Taylor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)). The short commentary is available in Arabic as well (*Epitome de Anima,* ed. Salvator Gomez Nogales (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1985)).

[241] ET in Ivry, 123 (modified). As Ivry notes in a footnote, "while Aristotle apparently intended this phrase to stand for the first thoughts we have […], it is likely (as suggested to me by Professor Druart) that Averroes understood it as referring to the first principles of thought, such as that the whole is greater than any of its parts etc." (*Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima, 207).

[242] I should add that he does make frequent use of the terms *ṭabīʿa* (Ivry, *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 26, 43, 44, 45, 47, 53, 56, 67, 74, 125, 132, 109, 110, 111, 112, 115, 125, 132) and *ṭabʿ/ṭibāʿa* (ibid. 9 (things existing naturally in the soul), 18, 19, 38, 55, 87, 131) interchangeably and in the sense of a straightforward nature (of the soul or the animal or the like), as well as *ʾistiʿdād* (ibid. 109, 110, 111, 112, 115) and *hāl/ʾahwāl* (ibid. 122) (in the sense of the intellect's disposition for the reception of forms or intelligibles).

sensation.[243] In his short commentary on the *Metaphysics,*[244] Ibn Rushd similarly affirms that human intellection depends on the senses.[245] Thus we read that "the human intellect depends in its thinking on the senses."[246] As he continues, "this is why, if we are deprived of one of the senses, we have no intellection of its [objects]."[247] *Fiṭra* is no longer the origin of the first principles since these are now the result of acquisition.

Two caveats should be mentioned: first, we could see that at points Ibn Rushd still retains the language of natural first principles. Often, as we saw, he does clarify that these *seemingly* natural principles are the result of sense perception. At times, however, he does just let it stand that there might be a natural source to these principles. Thus, in the *Middle Commentary* on the *Topics,*[248] he notes that, in contrast with dialectic (which is built on well-known things),[249] demonstrations are syllogisms built upon first principles known "by *ṭabʿ*."[250] While Ibn Rushd thus

[243] The long commentary affirms this broadly, as he notes here that there is general "uncertainty regarding natural propositions (which are such that we do not know whence they came or when) as to whether or not they arise from sense;" yet Averroes concludes that it seems "that they need sense" (*Long Commentary on the* De Anima *of Aristotle,* trans. Richard C. Taylor, 405).

[244] The long commentary is extant in Arabic in a 3-volume edition by Maurice Bouyges, *Averroes's Tafsīr mā baʿd at-tabiʿat* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938-42); the middle commentary is available only as unpublished version and in Hebrew; and the short commentary exists in translation (though without having a definitive version of the Arabic text), *Averroes on Aristotle's* Metaphysics: *An Annotated Translation of the so-called* Epitome, trans. Rüdiger Arnzen (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010). See Arnzen, p. 3 n.3 as well as p. 13. I consulted the Arabic version of the *Epitome* published by ʿUthmān Amīn, *Talkīṣ Mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1958).

[245] In his *Metaphysics,* Aristotle speaks of a first principle as "the first basis from which a thing is known" (Met. 1013a14–15). However, in the long commentary (*Averroes's Tafsīr mā baʿd at-tabiʿat,* ed. Bouyges, 2: 475-481) Ibn Rushd just speaks about the idea of the first principles as basic to knowledge, not their origin.
Similarly, I cannot find the discussion of knowledge dependent on the senses in the long commentary at present.

[246] ET in Arnzen, 160; AR in Amīn, 145.

[247] Ibid. On p. 31, 81, 113, 127, 128, and 148 Amīn has *ṭabʿ* for a general sense of nature and p. 32 has a section on *ṭabīʿa* as nature more generally. On p. 85 we learn about human disposition (*ʾistiʿdād*). That *ṭabʿ* and *ṭabīʿa* are synonymous for Ibn Rushd is not only the case in the *De Anima* but also appears true for the *Metaphysics.* For example, in his comments on book *Lam* (*Tafsīr al-maqāla al-marsūm ʿalayha ḥarf al-lām li-ʾAristūṭālīs* (Damascus: al-Takwīn, 2007), 76, 90, 95, 129, 140, 142, 182, 184, 201, 202, 206, 209, 216, 217, 219, 222-224). For an English translation of book *Lam* see *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's* Metaphysics, *Book Lām,* trans. Charles Genequand (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

[248] References are to edition of the *Kitāb al-Jadal* published in *Talkhīṣ manṭiq li-ʾArisṭū li-ʾIbn Rushd,* ed. Jīrār Jahāmī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-lubnānī, 1992), mujallad 6-7.

[249] He discusses some of these well-known principles in some detail on pp. 509-510.

[250] *Kitāb al-Jadal,* 503.

keeps (in some places) the language of fundamental principles rooted in nature, the term *fiṭra* no longer describes this nature.

Second, towards the end of his short commentary on the *Posterior Analytics,* when Ibn Rushd turns to the different uses of demonstrative discourse, the term *fiṭra* does show up. Discussing the principles used in instruction, he notes that there are four: first, there are the principles whose acceptance is "necessary (*wājib*);"[251] and the example is again that "the whole is bigger than the part."[252] Then there are hypotheses which are "not evident to the student from the beginning"[253] but he cannot disagree with them. The reason he cannot disagree is either "because of a deficiency (*naqṣ*) in his *fiṭra*"[254] which is due to his youth; or because "he does not know their universals;"[255] or because "acquiring certainty about them takes him a long time."[256] In those cases, the student's mind has to be strengthened, which is to be done via setting hypotheses down before him. Now while the connection, as in other commentaries, with demonstration is clear, *fiṭra* is not the source of the first principles and thus the basis of demonstration. Instead, it describes a student's level of intellectual preparation. Such a reading in fact fits with the conception of *fiṭra* in the religious works that I described above.

A similar use, to speak of people's intellectual deficiency, we can also find in the short commentary on *De Generatione et Corruptione.*[257] Right at the beginning of the work (Book 1), in the section on growth, Ibn Rushd asserts that growth, among other things, means the addition of

[251] *Short Commentary on the* Posterior Analytics, ed. Butterworth (unpublished), §85, p. 51 (my translation). Note also Ibn Rushd's discussion of Ibn Bājja's views of naturally occurring deficiencies in our nature, which prevent the development of certain sciences (cf. *Long Commentary on the* De Anima *of Aristotle,* trans. Richard C. Taylor, 395). Since this is a translation from the Latin, however, it is hard to say whether Ibn rushd made use of *fiṭra* here.
[252] *Short Commentary on the* Posterior Analytics, ed. Butterworth (unpublished), §85, p. 51 (my translation).
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] References are to the Arabic edition published by Joseph Puig, *Epitome del libro* Sobre la generacion y la corrupcion (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1992).

food from without; those who disagree either hold a wrong view or exhibit "a deficiency (*naqṣ*) in their human *fiṭra.*"[258] This again fits the differing, *falāsifa* reading that we saw in our discussion of the religious works above.

In summary we can see that *fiṭra* no longer provides the first principles or the basic building blocks of logic. In fact, these principles are mostly no longer natural for Ibn Rushd. In an effort to return to an 'authentic' Aristotelian image, Ibn Rushd, as many have argued, indeed believed all such principles to be acquired. This certainly represents the starkest departure from the technical use of the term in al-Fārābī. Fittingly, when *fiṭra* does show up in the commentaries it is mostly in a non-technical sense and predominantly in in the short commentaries—all of which were probably written very early and offer the least precise language and thought.[259] Adding this insight from the commentaries to my previous conclusion—namely the frequent and at times levelling, as well as more theologically oriented use of *fiṭra* as a form of natural rationality in the religious works— it appears that Ibn Rushd's use of *fiṭra* shifts in comparison to his predecessors: away from a technical, predominantly logical and differentiating use towards a more narrow, levelling, and religiously oriented one. Here *fiṭra* describes the basic rationality God has placed in human beings, giving room not only to what separates people but also anchoring humanity's shared abilities and interests.

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[258] *Epitome del libro* Sobre la generacion y la corrupcion, 9. The rest of the work—besides frequent uses of *ṭabīʿa* to speak of general nature—twice uses *ṭabʿ*. On p. 33 Ibn Rushd speaks of the four forces (hot, dry, moist, cold) of which each body has always two "*bil-ṭabʿ*;" but this seems also just another sense of 'nature.' Similarly, on p. 36 he speaks of things found in the earth "*bil-ṭabʿ*." The middle commentary, *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Kawn wa al-Fisād* also makes frequent use of *ṭabīʿa* in the sense of a general nature (*Averroes Mittlerer Kommentar zu Aristoteles'* De Generatione et Corruptione, ed. and trans. Heidrun Eichner (Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005) 53, 57, 73, 77, 90, 98, 116, 123, 130, 135, 138). Finally, there is also frequent use of *ṭabʿ,* also in the sense of 'nature,' in this work (47, 59, 77, 81, 90, 115, 116, 129, 130, 131).

[259] Though I should note that when he does use *fiṭra,* he seems to understand it in line with previous *falāsifa* and their intellectual reading; it is used to differentiate people and certainly does not retain much of the levelling or theological conception we saw above.

V. Conclusion

Fiṭra in Ibn Rushd's thought describes the distinctively human capacity for reasoning. As such it fulfills a double function, both differentiating and binding human beings. In this double function, Ibn Rushd's reading and use of *fiṭra* shares much with broader philosophical thought and its emphasis on diverse human dispositions. Yet it also points towards a certain shift towards (or at least engagement with) the consensus of the scriptural interpreters and the emerging thought of the theologians.[260] Comparing Ibn Rushd's engagement with the term *fiṭra,* as well as some of the central logical, political, and theological debates that relate to it, with that of the previous *falāsifa* allows some cautious observations. While Ibn Rushd continues to affirm natural differences of aptitude even in the religious works, *fiṭra's* role as the source of the first principles of logic is mostly disappearing. Instead, there appears to be a (for the *falāsifa* at least) stronger emphasis on what unites humans, particularly in their quest to know God, despite the affirmed natural differences. As we could see above, the absence of *fiṭra* in his commentaries corresponded to an increasing presence of the term in the so-called religious or philosophical works. And while it remains at times difficult to differentiate *fiṭra* from the related but broader concept of 'nature' as often expressed via the root *ṭ-b-ʿ*, we could also see instances where Ibn Rushd makes it clear that what is special about *fiṭra* is that it allows all human beings to reach some (very basic insights) about God and his nature. While Ibn Rushd is clear that this inborn capacity for rational discourse differentiates the select from the masses and sets them up for different kinds of discourses, he—unlike his predecessors—spends much time discussing a second, shared aspect of *fiṭra.* Finally, besides the explicit engagement with *fiṭra* in the religious works and the commentaries, we also saw that his complex conception of the human being influences Ibn Rushd's political thought.

[260] I am not sure how much this shift might also have to do with the fact that Ibn Rushd was familiar with the thought of al-Ghazālī.

United in their need to come together because of their differing talents and abilities, the shape of the human community is one of distinct classes and of order among those classes. While his society is thus still hierarchical, Ibn Rushd— unlike al-Fārābī, Ibn Ṭufayl or Ibn Bājja— crucially does not believe that humans can achieve anything by nature alone, in isolation, and without communicating across lines of difference. Rather, society, education, and religion are necessary or beneficial for even the most well-disposed. It is tempting to speculate that part of the shift in using and understanding *fiṭra,* as well as in his political commitments, might have had something to do with Ibn Rushd's audience and role in the community. As we saw, he stood out among the *falāsiſa* as a man of many hats.[261]

As we could see from my discussion above, many emphases of Ibn Rushd's engagement with *fiṭra* connect him to previous *falāsifa's* understanding of the term. Unsurprisingly, besides the shared affirmations, Ibn Rushd's thought also leaves a number of familiar concerns open.

1. The difference between multiple terms continues to be difficult to pinpoint. There is a sense in which *fiṭra* describes what God implanted in humans and, more than others before, a sense of the usability of this natural reason for theological questions. But it would be misleading to claim that Ibn Rushd is able to uphold this distinction throughout. At times *fiṭra, ṭabʿ,* and *khilqa* appear interchangeable. While I will return to this issue in the conclusion, I do think that this seeming interchangeableness calls into question the significance of the term *fiṭra;* and thus also the assumption that it at all times carries with it the distinction of 'createdness' by God.
2. More in terms of content, is unclear what the 'ceiling' of one's natural disposition or capacity (no matter what term used) is; and, relatedly, what the limits of education are. Broadly, it appears as if a 'healthy' or 'excellent' *fiṭra* is necessary but not sufficient and the same seems true for education. All benefit from it but it is not clear how fluid or mobile we can expect people to be. Put differently, how much impact does a person's *fiṭra* have on the course of their lives?

[261] Put differently, genre explains only to some extent the more frequent use of *fiṭra* in the religious works. More important seems to be the fact that, as I mentioned above, Ibn Rushd was engaged in a larger question of Aristotelian interpretation: he sought to deny the idea that Aristotle believed in first principles. As part of this larger effort, Ibn Rushd seems to have been involved in a genuine reinterpretation of the idea of *fiṭra.* It has become the grounds of more generally accepted or common knowledge (as well as retained the aforementioned, *falāsiſa*-sense of division of intellectual abilities). The inverse, a more technical reading as source of the first principles (as we could see in al-Fārābī, who believed in the existence of such principles) is disappearing with the general disappearance of such principles as Aristotelian ideas.

3. Ibn Rushd is clear that religion, a lower form of understanding revelation, benefits even those who theoretically can engage higher forms of discourse. Considered by itself, Ibn Rushd thus offers an answer to a concern that others had left open. However, this answer only sharpens another concern that underlies this dissertation's engagement with a hierarchical reading of *fiṭra* (or human nature more broadly): why this commitment to a hierarchical society at all. It has become very clear that a particular reading of humanity's constitution leads to a particular image of the just society, as well as of certain forms of governance. However, given that none of our thinkers actually offer much detail when it comes to the nature of such societies (whether in theory or praxis), the utility of such an image of humankind and its (hopefully by now very obvious) attendant social and political implications remains open. Is it just a form of commentary on Plato? Does it reflect actual political realities? I should add that like his predecessors, Ibn Rushd was not merely concerned with the question of human nature and its broader implications. The question of the social and political role of the philosopher culminates in his works in multiple ways. As mentioned, for Ibn Rushd all humans need education and society. More importantly, he believes that the philosophers do their work among the people. Rather than retreat into solitude, they must be prophets to the people. He thus places, besides the social and political roles, a sizeable pedagogical obligation on the elites. How such teaching is to be done, however, and by whom and in what fashion exactly, he leaves open.
4. Another continuous but open issue in Ibn Rushd's discussion remains *fiṭra's* connection to health. Throughout this dissertation we not only encountered the idea of the 'healthy' *fiṭra* as a starting point for consideration as a worthy conversation partner (al-Fārābī) but also numerous concerns such as the presence or absence of illness and physicians in the perfect city (Ibn Bājja) or the question of those so ill that society would be better off without them (Ibn Rushd). While I have no particular claims to make about this insight at this point, I think it important to note this connection to the theme of health and the multiple forms it has taken.
5. Finally, Ibn Rushd like none other pushes the question of the relation of theological and philosophical readings and uses of *fiṭra.* As a result, we are asked to consider the broader relation of these discourses. While Ibn Rushd continues in the vein of others before him, he alone engages the scriptural sources and (as a result?) seems to point towards a shift: while *fiṭra's* role in logic seems to diminish, theological concerns and a more levelling use of the term appear much more present in his corpus. Both from a conceptual and a historical dimension we are asked to consider the interrelation of what previously seemed more distinct: *falsafa's* way of using and conceiving of *fiṭra* and the more well-known conceptions of the scriptural interpreters.

At the very least, Ibn Rushd thus represents the end—or culmination—of an arc of philosophical and political engagements with *fiṭra* that were focused on difference. Ibn Rushd in many ways seeks to improve al-Fārābī's work on the Aristotelian corpus. Chiefly among those efforts is the attempt to rectify al-Fārābī's conception of the first principles as innate. At the same

time, several of Ibn Rushd's works explicitly address the religious majority or the Muslims of his time in their search for proper ways to approach God. His particular take on *fiṭra* illuminates both these efforts (as well as his political philosophy, as far as we can judge it from the materials available). While there are no 'natural' principles in logic, Ibn Rushd's vision of the human being aids his arguments regarding revelation and religion in his more popular works. And while he agrees with his philosophical predecessors that some humans might be more suited to certain tasks, he seems more interested than others in what in fact unites humanity and how a necessary social life and education benefits all. Most importantly, unlike any of his predecessors, he addresses the question of how religion might assist the elites in communicating with the general populace. Taking all of this into account, Ibn Rushd seems to have learned from some of the open questions we encountered previously, debunked claims regarding the potentially superfluous status of society, and generally appears to point us towards a transition. We seem to witness the beginnings of an engagement with a theological and levelling vision of the *fiṭra* that had characterized the conception of the scriptural interpreters and would shape that of the theologians in centuries to come.[262]

[262] By this I mean a reading of the term as relating to the primordial covenant as a moment during which God placed in (some or all) humans very basic theological insights, such as an awareness of his lordship and oneness (cf. chapter 2).

Chapter 7:
The *Falāsifa*'s *Fiṭra* and *Fiṭra* Commonly Conceived:
Lingering Concerns and some Suggestions for the Study of Islamic Ethics

I. Introduction

As I have shown in the previous chapters, *fiṭra* illustrates the complexity and diversity of premodern Islamic thought. Both when merely considering the perspective of the commentary tradition and when comparing the interests and claims of that tradition to the *falāsifa*'s engagement with *fiṭra,* one cannot deny the complexity, diversity, and contextuality of interpretations of this concept. However, comparing my analysis of the commentary tradition's as well as the *falāsifa*'s approach to *fiṭra* with the claims the prevalent literature has made about *fiṭra,* one cannot but notice a gap. Rather than levelling and focused on questions of religiosity, I have shown that there is more than one strand of interpretation: as my engagement with the *falāsifa* has demonstrated, *fiṭra* can be understood to describe a differing intellectual preparation and be of importance for political questions. While it is true, as scholars claim, that *fiṭra* does have religious meaning and import, the concept it is not restricted to such a conception. Instead, different thinkers beyond the theologians and scriptural commentators have used *fiṭra* and understood it with various emphases.[1] *Fiṭra,* as I hope to have shown by, is like any concept in the history of philosophy. It has a history and is subject to context. While I thus add something to the existing literature on *fiṭra*, my dissertation also challenges scholars for not paying greater attention to the possibility of diversity and complexity in their approaches to Islamic concepts. As I will argue in this chapter, my engagement with the *falāsifa*'s reading of *fiṭra* can offer methodological recommendations to the

[1] This is, of course, on top of the fact that already the commentary tradition (while certainly marked by a certain consensus) is not monolithic as I have argued in chapter 2.

study of Islamic ethics more broadly. For I am not alone in my assessment of the prevalent literature on *fiṭra* and its shortcomings. In fact, scholars in the study of Islamic ethics for years have called attention to the fact that the field as a whole needs to be more attentive to the contextual and complex nature of Islamic ethical thought. However, this is not to say that my own approach to *fiṭra* is free of shortcomings. I close this chapter by reflecting upon my own contextuality, as well as the limitations of the broader study of religious ethics. It would be duplicitous—given the entire argument of this dissertation—to fail to acknowledge how all intellectual efforts, including this one, are in the end embodied and bound by their own context.

II. *Fiṭra* as a case-study in the study of Islamic ethics

This dissertation has proceeded in three stages. In the first chapter I laid out the scholarly literature as it is available in several languages. I highlighted that most of that literature argues that *fiṭra* is a levelling and religious concept. Drawing primarily on the scriptural sources, their interpreters, as well as major theologians such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya, the majority of scholars assert that *fiṭra* is chiefly about humanity's natural awareness of their maker. In chapter 2 I showed that the scholarly literature's claim—which is largely based on scriptural and religious sources—is broadly true when we look at the commentary tradition. Commentators on the uses of *fiṭra* in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature largely agree that the concept is about humanity's natural awareness of God. However, already in my analysis of the commentary tradition we could discern certain emphases and interests, as well as shifts over time. Some commentators offered a more intellectual reading of *fiṭra,* others focused more on questions of predestination. Especially in the early modern and modern period, the issues surrounding the scriptural reference to *fiṭra* reflected the authors' concerns in their time, such as natural law or interreligious dialogue. Even in this one

discourse, the concept of *fiṭra* is more complex than much of the scholarly literature would allow us to believe.

The impression gained from chapter 2 became even clearer in the second part of my dissertation: my engagement with the *falāsifa.* When I traced the commentary tradition, I showed that the authors' readings and uses of *fiṭra* were contextual and reflected differing interests—including, *among others,* religious concerns about humanity's religious knowledge. When I turned to the four philosophers this impression of a potential complexity and contextuality of *fiṭra* became much clearer. For one, the *falāsifa* present a second strand of thinking about *fiṭra* that overall exhibits different interests, concerns, and commitments than those of the scriptural commentators. Additionally, each of the *falāsifa* had slightly different conceptions and uses of *fiṭra* since the concept served different functions for the different authors. In fact, often one author understood and used *fiṭra* in different ways across multiple of his texts. The case of al-Fārābī (chapter 3) illustrates this claim well: *fiṭra* for him, most generally, describes the inborn human dispositions. Depending on the context, these dispositions are the cause of a person's ability in music, logic, or political leadership. However, it seemed at times that all creatures—including non-human animals and even nature—have natural capacities that can be described by using the term *fiṭra* (rather than a straightforward 'nature'). Similarly, for Ibn Ṭufayl *fiṭra* is about a human's ability to reason their way through the universe, from simple causalities to higher forms of spirituality. At the same time, not all uses of the term '*fiṭra*' in Ibn Ṭufayl's famous *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* can easily be described by the same word. While the broad notion of inborn intellectual preparation/ disposition seems generally applicable, a few uses fall out of this description.

While this contextuality, and with it the concept's complexity, is a first finding, a second important one is that the philosophers—unlike the scriptural commentators or theologians— were

less interested in questions of shared human capacities. *Fiṭra* for them is often about difference, describing the different abilities or endowments of people for different tasks. Their conception of *fiṭra* as differing is often part of political discussions: a natural human sociability or a practical need for sociality, the ability/duty of some to lead others, the different approaches of different kinds of people to religion or to logic. My work on the *falāsifa* has thus shown two things: first, conceptions and uses of *fiṭra* in Islamic thought are complex. Far from always being a levelling concept, the term *fiṭra* can refer to differing human endowments (among other things). Second, and it seems relatedly, *fiṭra* can be used in more than one form of discourse; in fact, the concept can be used in a variety of contexts ranging from logic and virtue theory to mysticism and politics. Politics in particular was a topic of special interest to the *falāsifa* but, as I showed, the use of *fiṭra* is far from restricted to this.

At the end of section two of the dissertation I thus added two important insights to the literature on *fiṭra*: the concept is complex, and it can be used to discuss questions beyond the topic of human religiosity. Now, I believe that there is more to these insights than a mere addition to the scholarly literature. Section three—which is where we are now—is about what my insights might tell us about *how* we should think about the existing literature. Since that literature is by and large not attentive to the possible complexity of a fundamental ethical concept, my demonstration of that complexity challenges the dominant literature and its practices. After what I have shown about the differing readings and uses of *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa,* scholars can no longer claim that the concept simply describes a natural awareness of God or that it is overwhelmingly about human equality or merely a religious concept. My dissertation is, as I have noted repeatedly, not only about a fundamental ethical concept in Islamic thought but also how we approach concepts like *fiṭra* in the academic study of Islamic thought.

In the following section I will seek the support of other scholars of Islamic ethics to show the importance of an awareness of complexity for this question of how to approach the study of Islamic ethics. For as we will see, a lack of attention to context and intellectual complexity as I noted in the case of the prevalent literature on *fiṭra* is a widespread issue. Scholars for years have called attention to the fact that the study of Islamic ethics needs to be more attentive to context and intellectual diversity. I thus believe that my work on *fiṭra* can offer some valuable insights not merely to those working on *fiṭra* but to the broader study of Islamic ethics. I will discuss some of these insights in the third section of this chapter.

III. The Study of Islamic Ethics and Attention to Context and Complexity

I will now mention some recent works that agree with my criticisms as I have voiced them with respect to the prevalent scholarly literature on *fiṭra*. Chief among the issues I identified was a narrow approach to moral concepts and a willingness to apply particular findings to the history of Islamic thought as a whole. As I want to show in this section, I am not alone in my assessment of the field via the lens of *fiṭra.* Some others, too, have emphasized the complexity of Islamic ethical thought and problematized approaches—particularly of previous scholars in the field—that shun diversity and complexity.

Most recently, Cyrus A. Zargar's *The Polished Mirror* consciously distances itself from much other work in the field. His inquiry focuses on virtue ethics broadly conceived, or "a cluster of ethical themes," rather than "a fixed system among other fixed normative systems parallel to Anglo-American or Continental European philosophy."[2] Taking seriously the work of scholars

[2] Cyrus A. Zargar, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 7.

such as Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Alasdair MacIntyre, Zargar wants to call attention to context: "classical Arabic and Persian storytelling allowed abstract ethical theory to materialize as a part of human narratives, daily life, social norms, personal longings, and edifying entertainment."[3] In the conclusion Zargar particularly emphasizes the importance of the situatedness of moral thought. For him virtue talk, which was "part of a multidimensional and lived experience" is what "might have the most to offer, especially when Islamic ethics becomes portrayed as monolithically rigid, scriptural, or motivated by political ends."[4] The lens of virtue according to him allows for the realization that moral discourse drew on many and diverse pools of knowledge and alerts Muslims (and presumably others) today to the dangers of turning to their own sources "with insights gleaned from the Western ethical traditions."[5] In short, Zargar calls attention to the complexity and mundane nature of much of what can be classified as 'Islamic ethics.'[6]

Other works in Islamic ethics also exhibit an awareness of the importance of context, despite being less reflective regarding some of the difficulties of the field. For example, Kecia Ali in her *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Ḥadīth, and Jurisprudence* notes that when it comes to texts of the past, it is important to consider "the ways in which their authors' base assumptions differ from those of the present."[7] This is due to the fact that "people are

[3] *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism*, 21.
[4] Ibid., 298.
[5] *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism,* 301.
[6] However, I want to add that in Zargar's case, there is an unstated assumption that the category of virtue ethics, understood as an alternative between deontology and consequentialism, can now become the catch-all lens for many different writers, genres, and centuries in the Islamic tradition. This is based on the belief that from Sufism to philosophy, there is a shared "concern with the niceties of human character and with the perfection of the human soul by acquiring good character traits through habit" (*The Polished Mirror,* 7). However, there is a large difference between an interest in character formation and *eudaimonism.* Despite the interest in situatedness and particularity and the importance of endemic categories and concerns, Zagar still succumbs to overly simplistic readings of an entire tradition in pursuit of present relevance—in this case recent rediscoveries of virtue ethics.
[7] Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Ḥadīth, and Jurisprudence* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), xxvi.

influenced not only by religious texts and teachings but also by their own social, cultural, and religious backgrounds."[8] And while Vardit Rispler-Chaim's *Islamic Medical Ethics in the Twentieth Century* is mainly concerned with particular issues such as abortion, organ transplant, circumcision, AIDS, and euthanasia, the author takes pains to show that medical ethics between different societies and places and times differ. As she notes, "medicine grows in a particular society, which fosters unique religious, cultural and philosophical ideas, and these greatly influence medical teaching and practice."[9] Rispler-Chaim in fact emphasizes that "ethics constantly changes as it reacts to circumstances, which are seldom static."[10] Thus, in the conclusion, she notes that while it may be true that "the general topics and questions which contemporary bioethics addresses seem to recur in various societies," she does not believe that that also goes for "solutions and nuances which each ethics code finds for those questions."[11] While there might be shared dilemmas, solutions have to be worked out in each case:

> the solutions, to be applicable, must nevertheless be locally and independently provided in each society or religious community. This does not prevent the occurrence of certain similarities among various ethical codes. But such similarities should not be understood as an attempt to satisfy one common universal code. Moreover, even within what seems to be a single religious ethical code, such as the Islamic, we have found several trends which mirror philosophical, legal, and political disagreements among members of the same religious community. This testifies that the ethical code is being constantly shaped and reshaped, that it never reaches a final stage, and that it needs always to be reassessed against a defined chronological or temporal framework in order to be considered valid. The study of any ethical code can never lead to absolute conclusions, but only to relative ones, pertaining to time and place.[12]

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[8] *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Ḥadīth, and Jurisprudence*, xxvi.
[9] Vardit Rispler-Chaim, *Islamic Medical Ethics in the Twentieth Century* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1993),1.
[10] Ibid., 3.
[11] *Islamic Medical Ethics in the Twentieth Century*, 143.
[12] Ibid., 142. Mohammed I. Khan's *Medical Ethics, an Islamic Perspective* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 2013) reiterates this point; Anis Ahmed notes in the introduction to that volume that "all known civilizations have their distinct concepts of good and bad. Generally it is their local customs and traditions, which evolve into norms and laws. These norms and laws define for them what is good or bad behavior" (xviii). And I also want to mention Heydar Shadi's edited volume *Islamic Peace Ethics: Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Muenster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2017). Shadi notes the contemporary danger of "othering" and the reproduction of "Western biases" in Islamic ethics and hopes this publication of conference proceedings might "aid renewed dialogue with the 'other', and help to deal with self-other difference non-violently" (*Islamic Peace Ethics, 11*).

First, we see here an attention to context and the particularity of ethical norms based on different thinkers and their circumstances that Ali also exhibited. Second, Rispler-Chaim pushes back against the idea that there is a timeless, ethical conversation across traditions or even within a tradition. Instead, she affirms the open-endedness, diversity, and particularity of ethical discussions in Islamic thought and beyond.

Jonathan E. Brockopp's introduction to the volume *Islamic Ethics of Life: Abortion, War, and Euthanasia* also highlights complexity and diversity. He stresses that "there is no single set of Islamic ethical positions on war, abortion, and euthanasia." [13] This is especially the case since "ethical discussions in the Islamic world cover a broad territory that may challenge the boundaries of what is normally referred to as religious ethics."[14] Brockopp powerfully challenges the idea that we can simply make 'religious ethics' Islamic ethics without reflecting on the particular history, framework, categories of the study of ethics.

Kevin A. Reinhart in the afterword to the same volume strengthens this line of argument, claiming that within the study of different thinkers we have to be aware of their 'situatedness' which has so far not sufficiently been "recognized as a legitimate determinate of ethical judgment."[15] As a result, "to speak of a single Islamic perspective on an ethical question is from a scholarly point of view very dubious."[16] With this plea, Reinhart particularly seeks to put an end the idea that there is a single Islamic voice to reconstruct or engage with. Instead, "Western ethicists, perfectly comfortable with the welter of 'isms' and tendencies that make up their own discourse, seem often to look for a single interlocutor, a single foil, a single authoritative Muslim

[13] *Islamic Ethics of Life: Abortion, War, and Euthanasia,* ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 10.
[14] *Islamic Ethics of Life: Abortion, War, and Euthanasia,* 10.
[15] "Islamic Ethics of Life: Future Challenges," in *Islamic Ethics of Life: Abortion, War, and Euthanasia*, 216.
[16] Ibid.

with whom they can engage."[17] This, however, is futile given "the variation, diversity, and dynamism of authentic Islamic ethical expression."[18] Reinhart thus not only emphasizes the importance of context and diversity, as well as the problematic practices of unexamined comparative ethics as a primarily Christian enterprise; he particularly calls out the dangers of constructing singular 'Islamic' voices that seek to satisfy those in search of one Islamic conversation partner.

This little excursus serves to demonstrate that others writing on Islamic ethics in recent years shares the concerns I raised when discussing the prevalent scholarly literature on *fiṭra*. Reflecting on practices both within and without the field, the above scholars emphasize the need for both context and complexity when engaging with Islamic ethical thought that I have come to highlight through my work on *fiṭra*. Given these shared concerns, I believe the insights I gained from the foregoing discussion on *fiṭra* can translate into suggestions applicable the broader study of Islamic ethics the above scholars participate in. It is to these suggestions, as well as some lingering challenges, that I turn next.

IV. Recommendations and Lingering Concerns

i) Recommendations

By demonstrating the existence of a differing and politically relevant vision of *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa* I also identified a gap in current scholarship. I believe that the existence of this gap between the *falāsifa's* take on *fiṭra* and the current literature on *fiṭra* is significant. It should lead us to think about the kinds of practices that allow for this gap to occur. As I argued in chapter 1,

[17] "Islamic Ethics of Life: Future Challenges," in *Islamic Ethics of Life: Abortion, War, and Euthanasia*, 216.
[18] Ibid., 219.

scholarship on *fiṭra* is often narrow, focusing on a few thinkers and their particular readings; and mostly seems to shun the possibility of contextual readings of ethical concepts (and thus a diversity of understandings and uses). There are now, as I have shown, efforts to move the study of Islamic ethics beyond these tendencies and towards a critical engagement with the field's commitments and assumptions. I hope that both my primary text analysis and my engagement with secondary literature have illustrated this need to do better further. Working on the *falāsifa's* understanding of *fiṭra* and related questions against the background of both, current secondary literature in Islamic studies and contemporary debates within the study of religious ethics and the history of philosophy, I believe there are three major take-aways for the study of Islamic ethics.

1. Scholars need to widen their repertoire of texts. This is true with regard to both primary and secondary literature. It is not enough, as we have seen, to focus on the scriptural sources alone; and it would help to consider scholarship outside of Western or European languages. As both my survey of the scriptural commentators and of the non-Western or non-European scholarship on *fiṭra* have made clear, the more works one considers, the clearer the existence of diversity and complexity becomes. Engaging scholarly work from many backgrounds and languages allows for a more comprehensive image of the ways in which Islamic authors have engaged a certain concept.
2. More attention needs to be paid to the question of the place of normativity. While, as I have shown, scholarship in Arabic and Persian is more attentive to the diverse history of interpretation and thus also the complexity of *fiṭra,* many of these works do very little with these insights. Instead, they seem more committed to furthering certain claims, whether theological or about the history of Islamic thought. On the one hand,

this tendency explains why so few European scholars take non-European scholarship into account. On the other hand, this seems to throw the baby out with the bathwater. As I have shown, much can be gained from these works given their impressive command of primary materials. Rather than reject them altogether, it seems most prudent to have conversations about the place of normativity in the study of Islamic ethics. While the broader study of religious ethics, as I will discuss below, is beginning to have conversations about the effect of the Christian origins of religious ethics, Islamic ethics is often absent from these conversations (both with respect to Christian influences and, as I want to raise in this point, with respect to Islamic normative concerns).

3. The issue of normativity leads me to another suggestion: reflection. As the example of the Arabic and Persian secondary literature shows, it is not enough to just broaden one's textual repertoire. Scholars also need to broaden their approach to these texts. Put differently, there has to be a certain readiness to be transformed by the concerns and questions a text is asking, rather than a mere interest in finding confirmation for one's own convictions and interests. While we are, of course, all confined to our own horizons, I do think a more historically grounded and context- sensitive approach would allow the concerns of premodern authors and their texts to enjoy some breathing room.
4. Scholars need to deepen their awareness and appreciation of their own positionality. The inverse to showing more awareness of premodern authors' and their texts' positionality and context is a conscious engagement with, or at least awareness of, our own position as scholars of Islam and ethical thought in the 21st century. As my discussion of the scholarly literature on *fiṭra* showed, scholars do not sufficiently reflect

on their own motivations, aims, and limitations when approaching texts relevant to the study of Islamic ethics.

In short, scholars should be more aware of the insights of broader ethical theory and bring them to bear on their work with Islamic authors and texts. As I indicated in my first chapter, thinkers since Collingwood have sought to emphasize the importance of history in the study of ethical thought. Thinkers are embodied and their works are particular answers to particular challenges. Likewise, we as readers are embodied, creatures of our own context, its concerns, and possible range of answers. While we can neither step into the past nor shed the present, we can do more to be aware of our contextuality and that of the objects of our interest. In the study of ethics beyond the Islamic tradition, people rarely assume that a crucial concept such as 'reason' has meant the same thing from Plato to Kant. The same should be true when approaching concepts in the study of Islamic thought.

ii) Lingering concerns

Having stressed the need for width, breadth, and depth, for attention to context and the positionality of those studying the premodern texts, I am deeply aware of my own shortcomings. I believe pointing them out here is part of modelling a version of a response to the suggestions I just raised.

1. There are so many more primary and secondary materials. I am deeply aware of how little I was able to uncover regarding the diversity and complexity of debates surrounding the concept of *fiṭra* among four central Islamic philosophers. Pointing to the diversity of debates making use of *fiṭra,* their political import, and overall the

complexity of a central ethical concept often assumed to have one, stable, and theological meaning in Islamic thought barely scratches the surface of all those thinkers throughout Islamic history that have made use of the concept and its surrounding concerns. As the variety of discourses that employ *fiṭra* in our four cases showed, there must be so many other nuances, emphases, and interests across so many centuries and contexts.

2. The same limitations are also true when it comes to languages. I have attempted to consult primary and secondary materials in multiple languages, but I am subject to the limits of my education.
3. Finally, beyond what some might describe as the natural limits of any scholar, I am acutely aware of my own context. Here I primarily think about my training, my approach to the study of Islamic ethics, and my formation in the universities of the 21st century. These particularities of my training might have dictated that I ended up writing on *fiṭra* among the philosophers, rather than poets or mystics. They might have led me to attend to multiple authors rather than one. And they might have encouraged me to focus on questions of politics and ethics, rather than gender and sexuality, for example.

This last issue, the question of my own formation in and approach to studying ethics, deserves a little more attention. For it connects this project and its hopes for a better study of Islamic ethics to broader concerns in the study of religious ethics. Put simply, I worry about the ways in which I am part of the study of religious ethics as it has come about in Christian and post-Christian societies. Coming to the end of this project, I wonder whether the impulse to accord so much importance to the term *fiṭra* was more guided by a flawed or warped starting point: my own ideas and their roots in both the Christian-steeped study of religious ethics and the secondary

literature on *fiṭra* (rather than premodern Islamic thinkers and their concerns). While I have no answer to this question of my starting point, it is to this last issue that I will turn now: the implications of Islamic ethics' current shortcomings as just analyzed for the study of religious ethics as a non-Christian enterprise.

A recent issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* on the legacy of Christian Ethics in Comparative Religious Ethics (December 2019) shows that I am not alone in my worries. Conversations about the foundational role and continued influence of Christian ethics are now happening within the study of religious ethics. Importantly, however, the study of Islamic ethics is wholly absent from these broader religious ethics conversations. While I have argued above that scholars working on Islamic thought have begun to examine the commitments and assumptions of their field, this work rarely happens in conversation with broader discussions in the study of religious ethics (rather than merely Islamic ethics).

I broadly agree with Aaron Stalnaker in his contribution to the *Journal of Religious Ethics* special issue that "a purely objective, tradition-purged approach to religious ethics is not possible."[19] However, looking from the perspective of the study of Islamic ethics, I am more cautious that this illusion of objectivity means that we do not have to worry about the influence of Christian categories of inquiry and concern upon the study of other moral traditions. For Stalnaker we only have a problem if another discourse "constrained the topics, conclusions, or ends pursued in some question-begging or erroneous way."[20] But I am not sure whether or not such constraining happened is always so clear to ourselves. For example, the ways other scholars have engaged with *fiṭra* indicates that a certain constraint is present in the study of premodern Islamic thought,

[19] Aaron Stalnaker, "The Innocuous Legacy of Christian Ethics in Comparative Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47, vol. 4 (December 2019): 778.
[20] Ibid.

particularly in the shape of contemporary interests and assumptions. I thus think scholars of Islamic ethics are far from being "so anxious about being influenced that we strive for some impossible ideal of presuppositionless objectivity"[21]—the alternative to a reliance on inherited categories in Stalnaker's eyes. Instead, I think I have given some fodder to the claim that the study of Islamic ethics does not yet reflect upon its own practices, whether inherited or self-developed, sufficiently and productively.

Relatedly, I worry that my choosing of *fiṭra* and my approach to engaging with it has been deeply shaped by certain interests in the study of Christian ethics. As Jung H. Lee notes drawing on Sumner B. Twiss, "while there are now very few comparative works that invoke the categories of sin, redemption, salvation, or grace, there are many studies that focus on moral anthropology, the constitution of tradition, the nature of virtue, and the prospects for a common morality."[22] Some of those categories do structure my approach to *fiṭra* as well. As Lee and so many others rightly note, it is hard to become aware of and transcend our own prejudices and limitations.[23]

Speaking of my approach, I noted in the introduction that some might want to question the entire premise of this dissertation. Maybe my basic claim that—based on the *falāsifa*'s use and interpretation—*fiṭra* is a more complex concept than secondary literature has us believe, is flawed. Some might argue that when we try to understand a (seemingly theological) concept in Islamic thought, we should not consider the *falāsifa.* While I personally do not think there is reason to believe that the central figures of my dissertation were less Muslim than anyone else, some might want to question this assumption. After all, many of the texts I discussed saw the revealed approach to truth—while useful—as ultimately inferior or at least not necessary for some; a claim that

[21] Ibid., 779.
[22] Jung H. Lee, "Introduction," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47, vol. 4 (December 20019): 785.
[23] Cf. ibid.

appears incompatible with the Qur'anic message. And, even more importantly, some might argue that the vision of a humanity divided into elites and ignorant masses as expressed by the *falāsifa*'s conception of *fiṭra* is opposed to the Islamic vision of the human being in the Qur'an. In some ways, this question cuts to the core of an important, recently reexamined debate over what counts as 'Islamic.' It is to some extent a circular question. The philosophers are not 'Islamic' because their claims do not fit what is properly 'Islamic' based on a narrow conception of what counts as 'Islamic.'' However, as Shahab Ahmed in *What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic,* has recently argued, we ought to conceptualize Islam as a "hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation."[24] As a result, all things that are part of "*meaning making in terms of* Islam" are to be considered Islamic.[25] One does not even have to be a Muslim at all to produce Islamic acts. According to his reading, "what matters […] is *hermeneutical engagement* with the Con-Text of Revelation to Muḥammad. It is that hermeneutical engagement with Revelation that makes the act of the non-Muslim *Islamic.*"[26] As a result, the Islamic philosophers are most certainly 'Islamic.'

Having said this, I do not disagree with the general claim that there is such a thing as 'Arabic' philosophy. This is, in the words of Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor, "philosophy that begins with the rendering of Greek thought […] into Arabic."[27] While the origins of Arabic philosophy lie in the Islamic context (i.e. the translation movement of 9th- 11th century Baghdad), scholars were Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. And, as Adamson and Taylor note, those that we might consider Muslim "were interested primarily in coming to grips with the texts made available

[24] Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 435.
[25] Ibid., 445 (author's emphasis).
[26] Ibid., 449 (author's emphasis).
[27] Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* eds. Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

in the translation movement, rather than with putting forward a properly 'Islamic' philosophy."[28] However, as I have attempted to show in my chapter on al-Fārābī, while al-Fārābī was central to Arabic philosophy, there might also be something 'Islamic' about his use of *fiṭra.* Unlike some of his non-Muslim predecessors and successors, he consciously appears to use the word. Additionally, Ibn Rushd was of paramount importance to 'Arabic philosophy;' yet he was also both a judge and a jurist and served the Muslim community of his time. As Adamson and Taylor concede, while not all Arabic philosophers were Muslim, one ought "not to minimize the importance of Islam" for those who were Muslim.[29] There is Arabic philosophy as a complex movement that should not exclude some figures because they were not Muslim or study thinkers according to faith tradition

However, I do not think this argument in turn means that the philosophy of those Muslims that partook in this movement should be ignored when discussing Islamic thought. In fact, we ought to remember that for Ahmed all those partaking in Arabic philosophy or philosophy in the Islamic lands are in some way 'Islamic' philosophers. Using *fiṭra* is 'Islamic' in the sense that it is part of making meaning within the framework of the revealed will of God, using a Qur'anic word in philosophical works. Maimonides use of *fiṭra* should thus be considered Islamic and Christian thinkers who used *fiṭra,* if there were any. Clearly then, the thought of figures such al-Fārābī or Ibn Rushd should be very much part of the concerns of those working on Islamic ethical concepts such as *fiṭra.* As Adamson and Taylor note, just as the theologians responded to the philosophers, the philosophers responded to the theologians. We cannot consider their respective discourses as simply separate.[30]

[28] "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* 3.
[29] "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* 3.
[30] Cf. "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, 5.

I think my work on the conception and use of *fiṭra* clearly shows this interconnectivity (and maybe even interdependence). Scholarship on *fiṭra* needs to acknowledge the philosophical relevance of this seemingly 'theological' concept, just as I think that there is something 'Islamic' about the philosophers' use of *fiṭra.* As Ahmed would put it, *fiṭra* shows philosophical meaning making with respect to the context and text of the revelation in action. Showing the interrelatedness of Islamic thought and its discourses means when we analyze a concept such as *fiṭra,* the philosophers should at least be considered. And I should add: I believe that even if some readers are not convinced by my argument for the Islamicity of the philosophers, my broad argument stands. For I have shown that Islamic ethical concepts are contextual and complex. The conversations surrounding one topic, *fiṭra* in this case*,* are a lot more diverse, filled with different kinds of authors, and thus ripe for interdisciplinary discussion than what most secondary literature on the topic lets us believe.

V. Conclusion

I have noted the above limitations and particularities for a reason. I did not do so out of extreme self-deference or a desire for caveats. I want to actively embody a better—more honest and reflexive that is—approach to studying Islamic ethics. I am fully aware that am not immune to the essential insights of this dissertation: the need to attend to complexity and the importance of reflection upon the embodied, contextual, and limited nature of all of our scholarly efforts. I am just one in a long line of people thinking through *fiṭra*, with the questions that posed themselves to me in my own context.

However, not despite these limitations but because of them, I do believe that I can and have made important contributions. I do think that I am offering something new by using ethical theory and the history of philosophy to connect discussions of *fiṭra* in Islamic studies with the *falāsifa.* And I hope to model the kind of self-awareness that will allow other scholars to add their particular, contextual insights to this topic and to others in the study of Islamic ethics. No matter how little I chipped away on one concept, I believe that this dissertation contributes to an ever-growing pool of scholarship committed to a more theoretically rigorous and historically aware study of Islamic ethics.

Conclusion

I. Summary

Fiṭra is a complex idea. It is a connective point for several issues. It is not, as often assumed, restricted to concerns relating to human religiosity or logical abilities. Rather, the question of humanity's natural endowments connects political, theological, mystical, and philosophical issues.[1] The idea of *fiṭra* or the question of what is 'natural' to humanity, connects these different areas and their particular interests, puts a new spin or emphasis on certain questions, helps to illuminate others, and opens up new avenues of research.

I began by showing that already the earliest interpretations of the scriptural sources had room for a certain breadth and variety of arguments when dealing with *fiṭra* in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature. These interpretations are more complex than the scholarly literature would have us believe. That being said, the scriptural interpreters for the most part did focus on religious concerns or the question of whether all or some humans could naturally be aware of God. Additionally, they displayed a wide consensus regarding the questions and answers that are appropriate regarding the idea of *fiṭra.* This consensus goes some way towards explaining the current state of scholarship on *fiṭra.* That being said, a somewhat different image emerged once we turned to the philosophers. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the *falāsifa* did not confine themselves to the scriptural consensus and its predominantly theological concerns. They used *fiṭra* in a variety of ways and held differing views regarding the numerous topics of concern related to the idea that there is a way humans 'naturally' are and its larger implications. They in

[1] *Fiṭra* here resembles what Yair Lorberbaum has argued in his study of the idea of the *imago dei* in Jewish thought. See his *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 278.

fact represent a second strand of engagement with *fiṭra* that clearly demonstrates the complexity of this concept.[2] This is not to say that there are no connections between the generally assumed consensus steeped in scripture and the philosophes: some commentators focus more on *fiṭra*'s intellectual aspects or its relation to human reason, while others raise issues regarding human religiosity and knowledge of God. Nevertheless, I do believe I have gathered enough evidence to argue that we can broadly speak of two large camps when it comes to conceiving of *fiṭra*: a better-known and levelling one (i.e. that of the scriptural sources and their interpreters), and that of the *falāsifa,* which is more diverse and lends itself to discussions of politics, virtue, and logic among other things.[3]

However, I have not only shown that our conception of *fiṭra* ought to be more complex, considering not only the theologians and commentators but also the philosophers. Even among the *falāsifa* conceptions and uses of *fiṭra* are complex. One of the central findings of my work on the *falāsifa* has been a double use and conception of *fiṭra* as something that both unites and divides humanity. On the one hand, *all* humans have a *fiṭra* as creatures of God. For al-Fārābī this does not amount to much, especially since animals too could have this *fiṭra.* For Ibn Rushd, this shared human createdness allows humans to access important theological insights. Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl, on the other hand, are not interested in this shared aspect. For them *fiṭra* is what divides the excellent from the masses. Both al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd make much use of this division too. Most importantly, for all four of my thinkers this differentiating conception has above all political implications. While each of them takes this differentiating conception to a realm of their particular interests, there are important political implications to the differentiating conception of *fiṭra* in the

[2] More even than what my analysis of the scriptural commentators showed.
[3] I should note here that I do not think my argument directly impacts what Muslims, historical or contemporary, should think about *fiṭra.*

thought of all four. Yet again, diversity marks these shared political implications. While all agree that it is best for humans to live in society, not all of our thinkers thought it absolutely necessary. For Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl emigration is a desirable if not necessary option for the most excellent. For al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd by contrast, those of excellent *fiṭra*—the philosophers—have crucial political and pedagogical obligations they are not to abandon. For them, the ideal society is structured hierarchically and according to lines of *fiṭra. Fiṭra* for all these thinkers at once unites in some way and divides in others. All human beings have a *fiṭra* and yet *fiṭar* differ in very significant ways. Additionally, for each thinker, there are different ideas regarding what exactly unites human beings and what separates them, and whether unification or division are at the forefront of their discussion of human nature.

However, across this tension of union and division one constant is noteworthy. Despite a clear variety of arguments, concerns, and emphases, it is significant that none of the four can see humanity flourish completely alone. For Ibn Bājja possible emigration is to a group of philosophers and even the unique figure of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān lives out his days with a friend. This leads me to my two most important findings: first, the human being as envisaged by al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd is in need of others—maybe not necessarily in need of society but humans are not made for complete isolation. And second, this human being—above this level of a basic and shared human need for companionship—is naturally varying in talent. Taking these two insights together, as most of the thinkers explicitly state, human society is differentiated. While for Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Bājja this differentiation means separating the masses from the elite, for others it means a hierarchically organized society. Importantly, for none of the *falāsifa* separation, social differentiation, or hierarchy is unjust. In fact, al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd state clearly that *not* to have a hierarchical society ordered by capacities is unjust. Throughout I have thus spoken of a

double move when it comes to the *falāsifa*'s vision of the human being, affirming both basic commonalities and divergences as 'natural.' While details differ, the thinkers I considered in this dissertation broadly agree in their use of *fiṭra* as describing something that binds human beings at a very general level. However, more important to them is that beyond this basic level, *fiṭra* indicates what differentiates human beings.

II. Open Questions and Generative Issues

The double use of binding and differentiating human beings is, as I indicated above, the broad take-away from my work. However, as I have shown throughout the previous chapters, much difference lies in the details of each thinker's use and conception of *fiṭra.* While they all affirmed a framework that I would describe as both binding and differentiating, *how* al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd filled out the details of this framework differed. Each of them used *fiṭra* in the context of those questions that concerned them in their (intellectual) context and made different claims about the nature of the human being and its implications. While I have discussed individual conclusions in the previous chapters, I now consider all their particular claims and emphases together. Taken together, the philosophers both appear to elide and actively reformulate questions that we might have. This finding by now should not surprise us. As I indicated in my first chapter, when discussing the history of philosophy and of concepts, it is widely acknowledged now that the thinkers of the past addressed their own concerns, just as we do today. Many of the questions we might have today might simply be inappropriate or uninteresting to those of the past. While I have throughout indicated what I understand some of the concerns and commitments of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd to be when it comes to *fiṭra,* I also tried to follow their lead by seeking to understand how they *used fiṭra.* Seeking to balance our own interests as

well as what the texts appear to offer their readers, we see the emergence of several open question, as well as generative loci of further discussion. It is to these open questions and generative concerns that I turn now.

The first question we might have after wrestling with the different uses and conceptions of *fiṭra* among the *falāsifa* is both the simplest and the most difficult: what exactly *is fiṭra*? As I have shown, there are multiple uses and conceptions at play among the different *falāsifa.* Since none of the authors specifically dedicated a section to *fiṭra* or spent much time defining it, I focused in this dissertation on their use of the concept. Analyzing different uses led us to different conclusions, both across the works of a single thinker and across different thinkers. For some *fiṭra* appears to be a set of dispositions basic to flourishing. Others make it seem that *fiṭra* is a form of the intellect. Dimitri Gutas has noted that at its most basic, *fiṭra* is "not an additional faculty of the mind that has its own ideas, innate or not, but indicates merely the natural operation of the mind."[4] This broad definition seems applicable to all four of the authors I have engaged; but it misses out on some of their particular uses and arguments. We might call this definition the lowest common denominator since at the level of individual thinkers, there are many more nuances, complications, and conflicting claims or uses. I tried to highlight these particular emphases and their implications in the individual chapters. I am more confident about saying something about the ways individual thinkers used *fiṭra* and the implications of that use for their broader interests and claims. However, when it comes to the question of definition, I would argue that it is difficult to say something substantial about the *falāsifa*'s conception of *fiṭra* as a whole.

[4] Dimitri Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," *Oriens* 40, no. 2 (2012): 408. Mohamed S. Zarepour has recently responded to some of Gutas's claims regarding the role of the *fiṭrīyāt* in Ibn Sīnā's thought, specifically regarding the distinction between innateness and *a priority* ("Avicenna's Notion of *Fiṭrīyāt:* A Note on Gutas's Interpretation," *Philosophy East and West* 70, no. 3 (2020): 819-33). Neither Ibn Sīnā nor the *fiṭrīyāt* play a role in this dissertation; the former for a lack of space and time and the latter because the thinkers I engage hardly make use of this category.

Related to the question of what *fiṭra* is, is that of content. As we saw, our authors do not agree on whether *fiṭra* is more of a technique or something that provides all creatures (only humans) with certain content. Some seem to think of a natural instinct that aids all creatures in attaining their end. For others, there is more than this basic instinct; we might rather speak of inborn capacities or, in some cases, even an ability, to become good at a certain thing. Gutas again notes that rather than specific content, we might think of all things *fiṭri* as those things that the soul arrives at spontaneously and without doubt. [5] However, while this again might be true very broadly speaking, some thinkers—such as al-Fārābī—appear to ascribe more substantial content to *fiṭra.* For him it was not only that creatures strive for flourishing by instinct, at times he seemed to believe that some of the goods that lead to such flourishing are naturally known to some or all. For Ibn Rushd, on the other hand, it appeared important to emphasize that all knowledge is empirical and that there are in fact no inborn insights. While Gutas's argument is again broadly true, there is more to the question of content at the level of individual thinkers—even just across the four *falāsifa* I wrestled with.

Related to the issues of the nature of *fiṭra* and its content is one of terminology. As I just indicated, for some *fiṭra* closely resembles dispositions, for others it is a form or rationality or engaging in reasoning. In these discussions, both within the thought of individual thinkers and across them, it has at times proven difficult to differentiate *fiṭra* from other similar concepts and terms. These include a more straightforward 'nature' or 'instinct,' as well as 'character' or 'talent.' Some thinkers, such as Ibn Rushd, offer some help regarding the differentiation of these different terms but he, like many others, does not appear to stick to his own classification at all times. In the end I believe that this question of differentiation is an important point of further discussion. For,

[5] Cf. "The Empiricism of Avicenna," 407.

as I have argued in the previous chapter, it pushes me to examine my own assumptions in choosing *fiṭra* as a starting point and continuously according importance to it.

Another issue that for some thinkers seemed sorted but across the *falāsifa* considered here escapes a firm conclusion is how many types of *fiṭra* we ought to envisage. This is true both of human *fiṭra* and creation more broadly. While the general assumption—familiar to us from secondary literature—that *fiṭra* is the name reserved for the particular way God created humans, ppears often true, this is not always the case. As I have shown, for some thinkers *fiṭra* is a category that applies to all creation, for others to all animals, and for a third only to the human animal. Additionally, when it comes to humans, all authors either implied or openly stated that there are at least two types of *fiṭra*: the excellent and the deficient. Often there was also talk of the 'shared' *fiṭra* as well as the 'healthy' one*,* though in neither case it was always clear what that entailed. Finally, how to stack or relate those multiple categories remains uncertain. Is there a shared *fiṭra* which can be healthy and if particularly well developed or endowed can be described as 'excellent'? Is an unhealthy *fiṭra* different from a 'deficient' one and if so, how?

Further concerns arise from both a broader conception of *fiṭra* as something that binds and from the idea that there are different kinds of *fiṭar,* varying between the elites or the excellent and the masses. While I have addressed some things with regard to that broader, shared *fiṭra* above, I want to highlight next some lingering concerns with respect to the idea of a differing *fiṭra.* First, while most thinkers (when speaking about the differentiating *fiṭra*) use a division between 'excellent' and 'deficient,' another marker is that of 'health.' As I indicated throughout, it appears that the question of disease, its presence in different societies, and its meaning for the fate of those societies as well as those individuals considered 'diseased' was of great importance for thinkers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Rushd. While I lack the contextual and broader historical

insights to say much more about the significance and integration of this theme[6] at this point, I do think it is noteworthy.

A second noteworthy theme that is both connected to the idea of differing *fiṭar* and generative for further debates is that of a hierarchical society. All our authors, as I have shown, are committed to it. Justice for them is in fact hierarchical; but why? What is at stake for them? And how do these arguments relate to other interpretations of Greek political philosophy among Jewish and Christian thinkers? Relatedly, we saw that for all our authors the elites, the philosophers, the people of excellent *fiṭra* can be and perhaps *must* be the agents of change and resistance. But when and how was not clear. These are all points ripe for further, interdisciplinary discussion.

Finally, the question of different *fiṭar* raises issues about permanency or flexibility. Thinkers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Tufayl, and Ibn Rushd in particular raised the question of how much change exactly is possible regarding a person's *fiṭra*. Are all set from the beginning with one kind of *fiṭra* with no hope of improvement or risk of deterioration? And what are the social implications of such a possibility for deterioration or improvement? Relatedly, if improvement and deterioration are possible, education becomes crucial. While some authors discussed the training of the excellent philosophers, they often left out broader questions of education. Who ought to educate themselves and how? And what is the prospect of education for improving one's given *fiṭra*? Finally, what does education look like for the masses? The issue of education also pushes us towards discussions about the nature and role of religion. As we saw, different authors approached the role of revelation in the lives of both the elect and the masses in a number of different ways.

[6] Maybe beyond the general insight that, of course, people died much more frequently from diseases in pre-industrial societies.

Importantly, for all of them revealed religion is something positive, though different thinkers accord a varying roles to it in the lives of different human beings.

The *falāsifa*'s engagement with the place of revelation and the role of religion in the lives of different people leads me to consider a very abstract issue that has hovered in the background of this dissertation throughout: the relationship of different Islamic discourses to one another**.** On both a historical and conceptual level, the fact of the philosophers' engagement with *fiṭra*, as well as the variety of those engagements, highlight the need for us to consider our assumptions regarding the interrelation of different Islamic discourses. While al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Ṭufayl had shown little awareness of and interest in the scriptural commentators' arguments and conclusions, Ibn Rushd had been both more aware and more open to them. The most fundamental issue in the realm of historical and conceptual assumptions concerns the question of how much 'theological' content we can or should assume the *falāsifa* packed into their use of *fiṭra*. Meaning, when al-Fārābī chose to use *fiṭra* to translate his understanding of Aristotelian logic, why did he do so? Given that his predecessors had not used the term and, additionally, only some of his successors would, how much significance should we accord to its presence? Since al-Fārābī and others rarely ever defined it, should I maybe assume that for them it was merely another synonym for nature (particularly since all these terms are so notoriously hard to keep apart)?

However, the *falāsifa*'s use of a seemingly theological concept raises questions not only about the philosophical use of theological concepts but also about the nature of that philosophy. Is it Islamic or Arabic philosophy? Al-Fārābī's use of *fiṭra* against the background of his arguments for translating Greek philosophy into different registers could be taken to mean that there is Islamic philosophy as a sub-category of philosophy. Yet what does it mean for such a claim if

Maimonides[7] used *fiṭra* following al-Fārābī but Yaḥya ibn ʿAdī did not?[8] Additionally, how distinct are theological discourses? Is there such a thing as Arabic theology? All of these questions, I believe, give fuel to the current conviction that we need more and interdisciplinary engagements with thinkers and topics of a tradition that we struggle to approach and understand from the point of our current academic divisions.

I am not able nor interested in making definitive claims about who should be considered part of or important for Islamic thought. I think that based on the *falāsifa*'s use of *fiṭra,* our discussions about how to approach and conceive of premodern Islamic thought should not be closed. In this vein I think it important to highlight that considering the importance of the interplay and interrelation of philosophical and theological thought has been a topic of broader academic interest in recent years. The conversation between these two disciplines in the development of Western thought has received much attention through the work of scholars such as Dan Garber. My discussion of *fiṭra* calls attention to the Islamic philosophers and theologians sharing conversations on such fundamental questions as the nature of the human being. As the relation between Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd in particular showed, the claims regarding a differing *fiṭra* and the potential for social isolation based on a gulf of *fiṭar* was not well-received by all. While I did not have the time to attend to this issue in this project, my discussion of *fiṭra* pushes us to wonder how other Islamic thinkers responded to the arguments presented here. Ibn al-Nafīs offers one response but this dissertation mainly tells the tale of the 'other,' of those who made diverging arguments.

[7] Cf. p. 160 above.
[8] These are very broad statements based on the little foray into their thoughts I was able to do during this project. The life of *fiṭra* in the thought of either of these thinkers awaits further exploration.

Finally, I want to note two issues of contemporary interest that I believe my discussion of *fiṭra* spurs and leaves somewhat unclear at this point. First, the possibility of a natural law as humanity's inborn precepts provided by *fiṭra.* While there is much contemporary debate over the meaning of 'natural law,' the idea that there are certain things present in humans at birth—no matter who they are—is basic to the idea of *fiṭra.* More specifically, our authors agreed that a certain sociability is natural to all and for some this also included certain logical or theological insights. This is an area that I believe merits greater attention; not merely because contemporary scholars in religious studies and philosophy care about natural law or because the Islamic philosophers' interpretation of these questions and their different answers provide insights into early interpretations of Greek philosophy that would gain prominence later among Christian and Jewish writers. I believe it is most important that scholars across religious studies, law, and philosophy are aware of the fact that the Islamic philosophers—who of course predate many of the most well-known natural law thinkers—raised issues and made claims highly relevant to natural law discussions, both historical and contemporary.

A second, related issue deserves more attention than I could give to it here. Basic to the idea of a theological conception of *fiṭra* so important to the scriptural interpreters is that of a natural i/Islam or an inborn religiosity. This question of humanity's inborn ability to recognize divine existence, monotheism, or even more specific demands of Islam has captivated thinkers throughout the centuries. This question is deeply rooted in both the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature and merits its own monograph. I hope to explore what I might call 'an Islamic theory of religion and religions' at a later point, building upon the work I have done in this dissertation.

Before closing this discussion of open concerns and generative claims I want to turn from the conceptual to the historical. Coming to the end of this dissertation I wonder what documents

of the *falāsifa* that I do not have access to could solve some of my open issues. Additionally, I wonder what (at this point, unknown) insights into the *falāsifa*'s historical and educational realities would illuminate some of the dark spots of this work. Most importantly, in the dissertation I raised the issue of *fiṭra's* relevance to contemporary and later Jewish and Christian philosophy. I did not have the space or time to investigate this further. Some of the threads that I highlighted, such as Maimonides' interest in the term, might be the topic of an article. Others, such as the role of *fiṭra* for certain conceptions of religion, whether Islamic or Christian, will hopefully receive their due attention in the just mentioned next project.

III. Implication for How We Approach Islamic Ethical Texts

In the previous section I highlighted loci of further debate, as well as important issues left open. Both of these exist because the different texts I engaged with exhibited different approaches and showed different concerns and emphases compared to each other and to our expectations. Even among only a handful of thinkers we find neither a set of questions nor a limited menu of answers on the issue of *fiṭra*—indeed, even with respect to a single author. On the one hand we have thus learned several things for the history of Islamic thought: we have gained several 'positive' insights about what discussions that make use of *fiṭra* concern themselves with. This includes insight into the concept as well as its importance for political discussions, besides others. We also have gained some 'negative' insight through the continuously open questions and issues open for further discussion that I have just pointed out. But there is another area of insights, born from the tension between the interests of the scriptural interpreters and the *falāsifa,* as well as between the *falāsifa* and what we—based on the scholarly literature—assume to be the central claims and concerns of discussions making use of the term *fiṭra.* Another way of putting it is to say that the demonstrated

complexity and diversity of *fiṭra* has implications beyond the mere content of this complexity and diversity (which I sought to address in the previous two sections). These other insights that emerge from *fiṭra*'s complexity concern the way we approach our texts and the way we engage in the study of Islamic ethics, which has claimed *fiṭra* as a foundational concept in recent years. It is to these insights that I turn now.

My work on *fiṭra* offers contributions to the study of Islamic ethics in three general areas: conceptual, methodological, and historical. On a conceptual level my study of *fiṭra* showed us the complexity of an ethical concept and its ability to participate in various and at times conflicting arguments across authors, time, and locale. I demonstrated that this concept is far from restricted to its (already not singular) scriptural use and levelling conception. Instead, there is variety both in conception and use: *fiṭra* can be conceived of as one and as multiple and thus used to both unify and separate humanity. Even the relatively stable readings of the scriptural commentators showed, upon deeper examination, a variety of conceptions, complexity of debates, and development of arguments across time. Given this variety of conception, arguments making use of *fiṭra* were far from restricted to the theological; rather, logical and above all political implications were at the forefront of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd (from questions of inborn human sociability and capacities for logical and spiritual insight, to the best form of political formation and governance). What this shows on a conceptual level is that ethical concepts are not stable or limited to a single discourse. Across time, place, and thinker they can take on different meanings and aid different kinds of argument. My work on *fiṭra* is an attempt, first, to show that like any concept, *fiṭra* has a history and particularity. More specifically, I also hope to have shown that the particular concept of *fiṭra* undergoes both significant transformations and a remarkable level of

stability from its seeming introduction as both something unifying and dividing at the hand of al-Fārābī all the way to Ibn Rushd.

That a concept such a human nature is contextual and has been read in multiple ways is noteworthy for both the history of Islamic thought and the study of religious ethics. As I showed in my first chapter, this topic has received attention in the history of philosophy. However, many contemporary scholars working on Islamic ethical thinking have argued that in the study of Islamic ethics the complexity and contextuality of concepts is an underdeveloped topic. For many it is still a surprise that concepts have a history. On a methodological level bringing the history of philosophy or the broader study of ethical concepts into conversation with the assumptions and approaches in Islamic studies promises to be fruitful beyond the immediate topic of *fiṭra*. Those studying Islamic ethical concepts can gain much methodological support and challenge from those working on the conceptual complexity of basic ethical concepts. For example, instead of assuming that these basic concepts are fixed or monolithic, scholars ought to be attentive to individual authors and their particular emphases in their time and context. At the same time, as we saw, some scholars are already aware of this complexity, either because they encounter it in their primary texts or because they assume it. For such scholars, thinkers in the tradition of Collingwood offer further support and guidance. Finally, as I have noted throughout, the broader study of ethical concepts as well as the study of religious ethics has much to gain from this collaboration with Islamic thinkers. For it adds new data to ongoing discussions in the respective fields, furthering existing conversations.

On a historical level we could see that *fiṭra* to some extent reflected different ways thinkers dealt with the Islamic world's encounter with Greek philosophy. On the one hand, al-Fārābī appeared to use the term to translate his understanding of both Aristotelian logic and Platonic

politics into an Islamic register. On the other hand, Ibn Rushd's use and conception of *fiṭra* reflected his efforts to establish a different understanding of logic. While he agreed with the broad strokes of previous *falāsifa*'s visions of politics, we noticed an increasing move towards the interests and arguments of the scriptural commentators. Between al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd we observed *fiṭra* doing work for Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl as they argued for different understandings of the political nature of the human being, the need and benefits of sociality, and the possibility of isolation. *Fiṭra* thus offered us historical insights into shifting concerns among Islamic thinkers in their context, especially as they navigated the integration of Greek philosophy with Islamic scriptural sources and commitments. Looking at the Islamic philosophers we cannot but marvel at the intellectual interconnectivity of late antique, medieval, and early modern thought: from the textual and conceptual influences in commentaries and super commentaries, to textual transmission and networks of teachers and students. Most fundamentally, this interconnectivity challenges divisions of thought and work in our approaches to teaching and research today.

I have argued that beyond contributions to and insights into the history of Islamic thought, my engagement with the complexity and diversity of *fiṭra* and its political importance in the thought of the *falāsifa* can offer valuable insights to the study of Islamic ethics as a field. *Fiṭra* here serves as a case study, aiding the efforts of scholars who have bemoaned insufficient attention to the complexity and contextuality of Islamic ethical thought. As the small example of the *falāsifa*'s uses and conceptions shows, there is a need to expand. We need to read a variety of authors and texts in their context, language, and with secondary literature beyond English. This way might be able to avoid using one genre and its reception in English literature to speak for an entire tradition and instead become more attentive to the complexity and contextuality of Islamic ethical thought. As I have sought to demonstrate in section two of this conclusion, this complexity

and contextuality does not diminish the contributions of premodern Islamic thinkers to questions of interest today, in the study of Islam and beyond. To me at least, exploring the depth, breath, and implications of a single concept such as *fiṭra* illustrates the richness and complexity of both ethical concepts and Islamic thought.

IV. Epilogue

I began this dissertation by drawing our attention to age-old and enduring questions: what is the human being? What unites it with and separates it from other human beings? And I noted that we lack Islamic perspectives on these crucial issues, despite the fact that Islamic thought has been and continues to be an important part of our intellectual and social life. I sought to rectify this lacuna by introducing scholars to the Qur'anic concept of *fiṭra* and the ways it has been utilized and understood in Islamic thought. While a more levelling reading has received much attention and been accorded the prime representative role when it comes to constructions of Islamic conceptions of human nature, I have shown the complexity and richness of a second strand, which is largely absent in scholarship. We might call this second approach elitist, dividing the people into the masses and the elites. Beyond the fact that we can thus speak of two ways of reading the idea of the created human being, I believe that an illustration of the breadth and depth of the Islamic perspectives in general and the philosophers' contributions in particular not merely add complexity to our debates but above all offer new insights and challenges. I am not striving to be comprehensive, but I think that—beyond the interests of the scholars just outlined—the *falāsifa's* reading of *fiṭra* matters for citizens of the world (Muslim or not) for several reasons:[9]

[9] Much credit to Gabriel Citron for helping me formulate these reasons.

First, considering the *falāsifa*'s views means we avoid stereotypes and caricatures, both of Islamic thought and of the philosophers, who have been perceived as 'un-Islamic.' Instead, engagement with the Islamic philosophers not only shows the breadth of Islamic perspectives but above highlights the deep interconnectivity of premodern thought. Most fundamentally, engaging the *falāsifa* and their works challenges our contemporary distinctions between Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thinkers.

Additionally, we benefit from complexity, even if we do not subscribe to all assumptions or conclusions. Through the specific work of the philosophers we encounter crucial questions and a variety of answers regarding the idea of the human being that can enlighten and challenge us equally today. Chiefly we saw that the social commitments of a person holding the view that people are naturally of different abilities can vary. Views of an unequal human nature do not necessarily make for unequal societies. As the examples of Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl illustrated, positing different human dispositions does not have to lead to a society in which the distribution of power is slanted to the excellent; rather, across different philosophers the abilities, roles, and destinies of the excellent and the masses are understood in vastly different ways, alerting us to the importance of careful readings and attention to context.

Third, engaging the *falāsifa* and their works allows us to discover new questions and rediscover forgotten ones since they go beyond theological concerns; this way they assist us with the complex question of human nature in the present. Engagement with the Islamic philosophers offers different answers to questions that appear as pressing as they are 'tough' to ask today: are humans necessarily social? How do we communicate across lines of difference? What is the role of education, religion, and community in the lives of different people? What obligations do the privileged have to those less fortunate, from guidance to political subversion? And finally, if we

journey towards the same end in different ways, is one way necessarily more inferior than the other?

Finally, I do think that some of the *falāsifa's* answers—and not merely the questions they ask—are worth listening to, particularly when it comes to the relation of philosophy, religion, and politics. For example, Ibn Rushd gives a fascinating spin on the question of how, if we assume human diversity, we should envisage people living together: while he does see political power distributed along lines of ability, he also affirms the essential political nature of all humans, the relevance of revelation for all, and the universal benefit of subjecting oneself to religion as a means of communication and effective leadership across lines of difference. His argument for the need for the philosophers to be prophets, able to address, convince, and sway people by using language and imagery that they can understand, is not only very powerful but also moving. On a broader level, we see how philosophical thought has progressed: from the quite optimistic and elitist claims of al-Fārābī, via the more tempered visions of Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl, to a more cooperative picture of society. More importantly, Ibn Rushd's vision of the relation of politics, law, and religion—in which religion and philosophy are of equal standing—is one marked by mutual accountability in which the masses and elites could share some means of communication.

In times of increasingly diverse societies having a fuller and richer engagement with some of the most basic and yet most pressing questions of our time is an obligation for citizens, teachers, and students alike. While we know that the Islamic tradition was foundational for the development of medieval and early modern thought, this tradition and its heirs continue to play a very small role in our conceptual and pedagogical engagements with crucial topics that animate the present. And sometimes if they do, Islamic thought is presented as monolithic or simplistic. In researching the diversity and complexity of the *falāsifa*'s approach to *fiṭra* , I hope I have lent more support to

what the (academic) world has come to believe: that it is well worth integrating Islamic perspectives into discussions of fundamental questions such as the nature of humankind.

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I ignore the Arabic definite article *al* in listing proper names and book titles. Thus, you will find al-Fārābī under "F" rather than "A."

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